CHILDREN OF GIBEON

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CHILDREN OF GIBEON

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CHILDREN OF GIBEON

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF 'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN'
'DOROTHY FORSTER' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London
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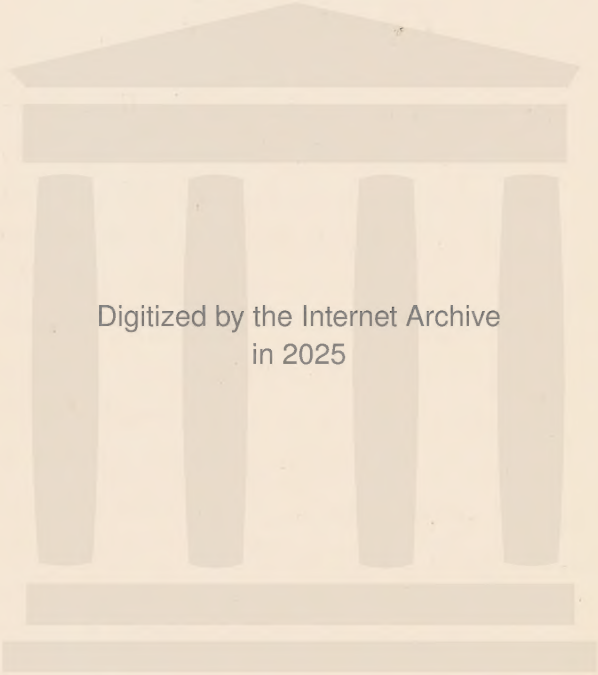
PREFACE.

I HAVE learned with pain that the Rev. Freeman Wills, Vicar of St. Agatha's, Shoreditch, has suffered some annoyance by being taken for the Vicar of St. Agatha's, Hoxton, whose church is mentioned in these pages. I deliberately chose the title of St. Agatha because there is no church with that name in Hoxton. Unfortunately I forgot to look through the list of churches in Shoreditch, of which Hoxton is supposed to be a part. I can only say that Mr. Freeman Wills is not the curate of St. Agatha's mentioned once or twice in these pages, nor was his the church which I had in my mind.

W. B.

UNITED UNIVERSITY CLUB:
October, 1883.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CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

PROLOGUE.

PART		PAGE
I.	POLLY-WHICH-IS-MARLA	1
II.	THE STROKE OF FATE	25

BOOK I.

CHAPTER		
I.	AT NINE O'CLOCK	39
II.	WHICH IS MY SISTER	61
III.	JACK CONYERS	82
IV.	THE HAVEN OF REST	100
V.	THE LAW OF ELEVENPENCE HA'PENNY	127
VI.	AN UNLUCKY DAY	152
VII.	AFTER MELENDA	168

CHAPTER PAGE

VIII. ALICIA 181

IX. SAM 190

X. THE GREAT RENUNCIATION. 213

BOOK II.

I. 'I AM YOUR SISTER' 235

II. THE CITY OF HOGSDEN 263

III. ON CURLS AND DIMPLES 285

IV. LOTTY'S ROMANCE 300

CHILDREN OF GIBEON

PROLOGUE.

Part I.

POLLY WHICH-IS-MARLA.

'Sit down, Hester, and let us talk. It is seventeen years since you saw me last.'

'It isn't the time I grudge, my lady, Hester replied, plunging her bare arms into the soap-suds; 'it isn't the time, but the things are promised, and a laundress's word is her work. If she breaks her word, it's leave the things and change the washing. And a lovely drying day.'

She spoke with two pins between her lips. People of her walk in life, unless they happen to be Chinamen, always while they are standing at the wash-tub carry two pins in the corner of the mouth—they are not even safety

pins; and the practice gives them for the time a curious thickness of speech.

'Let me talk and work at the same time, my lady, though it is such a long, long time since last I set eyes upon you; and a beautiful little creature you were, to be sure. Lor' a me!'

She was a woman of five- or six-and-thirty: country-bred, as you could very easily tell by the rosy hue of her cheek and by its amplitude, by her figure, full and comely, and by her breadth of shoulder. The London air—it is the fog in it, perhaps, or the smoke in it—produces in the second and all succeeding generations, a diminishing effect: it narrows and slopes the shoulders; it contracts the figure, it shortens the stature, and it makes the features small; in fact, it makes the London girl small all over, yet it doth not leave her without charms of her own, as is daily testified by many. This woman was a big woman, looking still as if she was fresh from field and country lane; her forehead was lined, her mouth was drawn—but this might be due to the presence of the two pins; her eyes were limpid and full and in

colour brown, something like the eyes of a hare when she is not frightened. They were set and framed in a network of lines and crows'-feet, and when she was alone they had a trick of hardening. This may have been caused by trouble, or perhaps it was only the natural result of the weekly arithmetical exercise peculiar to her profession, and worthy of a Babbage, in which the good woman had to enumerate, divide out, add up and make to come right, all the socks, handkerchiefs, shirts, collars, and cuffs entrusted to her care. As for her features, they were plain and even rugged. A working woman may very naturally acquire, by the age of six-and-thirty, from her life of struggle and work, a very considerable amount of hardness. But with Hester the ruggedness seemed part of the original mould, as if Nature had left the face in the rough without the final stroke of the chisel. I do not think that Hester had ever been beautiful; but by reason of her hair, which was still plentiful, and of a warm red colour, and her limpid eyes, she may have been in her youth pleasing to look upon. It seems a fond thing to speculate upon the

possible beauty of a washerwoman in the vanished days when she was young. But it has a certain interest for us, because she had children with whom we have to do, and it is a melancholy reflection that so little interest is generally taken in the past beauty of a woman, whether she be a washerwoman or a duchess.

As for her expression, it was grave and even sad at times: and when she was hanging out the clothes, or when she was ironing, or whenever there were no pins in her mouth, her lips had a habit of silently monologuising, moving in the manner of one who speaks with great rapidity, but with no audible utterance. What she said in these soliloquies one knows not; perhaps she was rehearsing the weekly returns, as, 'Six p'r o' socks, six; ten handkerchiefs, ten; seven shirts, seven,' . . . and so on; accuracy in a washerwoman being as desirable as despatch in a dentist. Or in that silent and mysterious way she may have been recalling scenes in her past history. If so, they were not pleasing scenes. Mrs. Monument's face, to those few who can read the history of a life in a face, showed unmistakable

signs of trouble; any one who knew the history of that trouble could without difficulty point to individual lines, wrinkles, and crows'-feet directly caused at various stages of it; to most of those who were ignorant of this history, and perhaps too much occupied by their own misfortunes to think much about other people's, the lines about the mouth, the wrinkles in the forehead, the set eyes, and the hardened mouth conveyed no more meaning than an inscription in cuneiform. It is, in fact, only the novelist, and he only for purposes of his art, who studies the human face when it is past the time of beauty, and strives to read, with the help of what he knows, the emotions and sorrows which have left their mark upon it. It is too often, however, like reading a Greek classic with the help of an English crib, which has lost the charm of language.

'Seventeen years ago, Hester,' said Lady Mildred, 'I was taken to see your wedding at the village church, and I thought you the most beautiful and the most enviable creature I had ever beheld, in your white dress and your curls.'

Hester played with the soap-suds and smiled. Then she frowned at her own foolishness, and then she smiled again. Since Lady Mildred was so good as to say she had once looked like a beautiful woman, it was not for her to contradict her; henceforth the memory of her wedding-day would possess another and a brighter association. But Hester, who was truthful by nature, had never been accustomed to think of herself as beautiful. Plain girls sometimes make their own consolations for themselves—notably, the comfortable assurance that as many plain girls get lovers as pretty girls—but they are never under any illusions as to their own looks. Hester, however, permitted her mind to dwell for a moment on the memory of her ruddy and rosy cheeks and white dress, and on the fashions of the year 1848, and the people in the church, and she smiled again.

As for the day, it was the brightest and warmest day in June ever known, and as for the year, it was in 1866. The house was one of a small row of little five-roomed cottages, irregular, picturesque, with red-tiled roofs and red brick chimneys; they have now all been

pulled down, not because the landlord was one of those who despise old things and love to tear down and destroy, like a First Lord of the Admiralty with the old ships, but because if they had not been pulled down they would have fallen down. Wherefore now, a terrace of little houses with bow-windows, built of grey bricks, all exactly alike and with slate roofs, stands in their place, and those who remember the former cottages fall to weeping when they pass that way. The houses stood in a strange and mysterious place, on the actual and visible marge of London, looking out upon the low green levels with which Hackney Marsh surrounds the river Lea and prohibits the further march of brick. White mists lie over the Marsh in winter afternoons and autumn evenings, and make it ghostly to look upon; but it is a keen and healthy air which sweeps across the plain, a good drying air for linen, and a bracing air for children with strong lungs and sound throats. Each of the cottages stood behind a long narrow strip of garden, which was by some laid out and planted with onions, cabbages, peas, potatoes, and beans, but in more than one case was left fallow, so to

speak, dotted here and there with patches of turf, and decorated with bare masts or poles instead of trees, connected by ropes, with hanging linen instead of waving foliage and blossom. It was, in fact, a convenient spot for washerwomen, and Mrs. Monument 'did,' single-handed, or with only occasional help, for two or three of the first families in Homerton and Hackney, sister suburbs, which melt imperceptibly into one another, and seem to differ in no other respect than that of magnitude. The fruits of her labour hung, every fine day and all the year round, upon the lines in the garden, and floated in the breeze, bulbous, spherical, wafted this way and that, with the undulations and the graces of a corpulent fairy, across the flower-beds where no flowers ever grew.

Beyond the garden the eye roamed free and unchecked across the Marsh, a bare flat expanse of green turf, cut into irregular shapes by the elevated roads which cross it, deserted in the morning, but in summer evenings and on Sundays covered with the lusty youth of Hackney Wick; beyond the Marsh is the Cut, up and down which go majestically the

barges of the river Lea: then more marsh, and then the Lea itself, narrowed by reason of the Cut, with high banks of mud and still tortuous, as if resolved to keep its character to the very end. There are two bridges over it—one a narrow footway of wood, rustic, ancient, not without beauty; the other new and broad for carts and cyclists as well as for those who go afoot. The Marsh is not, it must be confessed, one of the most romantically beautiful spots upon the earth; but it lies open to all the winds of heaven; those who walk across its causeways may perhaps still get ague as they used to do in the brave old days, but at least they are outside the houses, which is a very precious thing to dwellers in Hackney and its sisters. In the eyes of Mrs. Monument the Marsh was chiefly delightful because all the winds which blew across it came to her drying ground fresh and free from smut. Can Hyde Park boast as much?

The cottage contained a kitchen or laundry, with a red brick floor, looking upon the garden. Here were the wash-tubs, and a boiler, and pattens, and a board to stand upon. Behind it was a sitting-room, or living-room, and above

were two bedrooms. Naturally the steam of the tubs filled the whole house and ascended continually unto the heavens like the smoke of Vesta's sacred fire—none of the Monument children except Polly can ever pass the steam of a wash-tub without being instantly transported back to Hackney Marsh and filled with the sense of a universal washing-day, as if the rivers and lakes of the whole world had been turned into hot and steaming soap-suds. Outside the door was a rustic porch grown over with jessamine, and within the porch at the open door stood a young lady. In the year 1866 she was four-and-twenty years of age, and in the eyes of her generation she passed for an extremely beautiful woman; her portrait may be found by the curious adorning any Book of Beauty belonging to that time. She wore a huge crinoline, she carried her hair in a big net, and, after the fashion of her time, she made herself look as short of face and of limb, as dumpy of figure, as nature would allow. When one thinks of that time, and of the truly sinful waste and throwing away of feminine loveliness and grace which went on daily and from year to year, it is not pity that one feels so much as blank

wonder that women could be such fools as to disfigure and transform themselves.

As regards Lady Mildred Eldridge, one would have felt a very human pity, because, in addition to her hideous crinoline, she wore widow's weeds, with a vast quantity of that dolorous crape which every husband who truly loves his wife ought to forbid in his will.

'And to think, my lady,' said Hester, 'of your remembering me after all these years!'

'I remember, Hester, how sorry I was when you left the nursery to get married. It was the first grief of my life.'

The woman's face darkened.

'To get married!' she echoed bitterly. 'Oh! what fools girls are! Just to get married! To leave a pleasant home full of kind ladies who'd never throw them over, and run into the arms of the first chap who comes along with a smile and promise! If it wasn't for the blessed children, I sometimes wish I had thrown myself into the cold river the morning of my wedding. Perhaps it would have been better for them too.' She wrung a handful of linen as if she wished it had been her husband's neck.

'Hester!' The young widow was frightened

at her old nurse's vehemence. 'Hester! Tell me something about it. And why have you taken your maiden name again?'

'I changed my name to get out of my husband's way; but it was no use.'

'Out of his way?'

'Yes, my lady. But never mind about my troubles. And you with your own to bear, and a widow's cap and all at your age, poor dear!'

'I have been married too,' Lady Mildred replied calmly, 'and I have lost my husband. But about yours, Hester?'

'He is dead,' the woman replied, with an obvious effort, as if it pained her so much as to speak of him. 'He is dead, and I pray that my children may never hear tell of him!'

'I am sorry. Poor Hester!'

'There are some troubles.' She left the wash-tub and sat down, wrapping her apron about her bare arms. 'There are some troubles, my lady, that women needn't be ashamed of — such as men are born to as the sparks fly upwards—and there's some troubles that we can't think of, though we must, at times—let alone speak of. Troubles that spoil the lives of innocent children.'

'There are, indeed, Hester. If these were yours, I am sorry for you.'

'We came up to London,' Mrs. Monument went on, 'to get work. That's what he called it. Oh, fine work he got! He was a locksmith, and it's a trade which finds out a man's cleverness and leads him into temptations. Whatever his work was, there was always plenty of money, and I was happy. Oh, who could have told beforehand what was going to happen! Then my Joe was born.'

'What did happen, Hester?'

'Nothing, my lady,' she replied evasively; 'only that I went to live by myself with the baby, and took my maiden name, and hoped never to see him again.'

'And then?'

'Oh, he found me out. But he is—— buried.' There was just a slight pause, as if she was not quite certain whether he was actually buried or only dead, and still awaiting that rite, like one of the melancholy ghosts on the shores of Styx; though if they knew what was waiting for them on the other side they would perhaps send up word to their relations not to bury their bodies.

Everybody has remarked the fondness which all well-regulated women entertain for a good round solid aphorism. It never loses its freshness for them. Therefore it was natural for Lady Mildred to remark solemnly: 'Where there is no escape from evil save by death, it is better that one should die.'

'Provided it's the right one,' said Hester. 'Because, if I'd been took, what in the world would ha' become of the blessed children?'

'Where are your children, Hester? How many of them have you?'

'Polly-which-is-Marla,' replied Hester, as if the four words made but one name, 'is playing among the linen—bless her!—where she can't come to no more harm than a slap in the cheek from a wet arm or a flapping skirt.' She went out into the sunshine and shaded her eyes with her hand, and called, 'Polly! Polly! Come to mother!'

Then there came running out from among the hanging clothes a little girl of two years. She was an extraordinarily beautiful child, though her frock was ragged and dirty, and the cap tied round her head had seen long service. Her short brown curls lay over her

forehead and pressed out the cap; her deep, mysterious eyes gazed shyly at the visitor; her parted lips made the sweetest rosebud of a mouth. Two years old! This is the age when the infant passes into the child; she is still irresponsible, without morals, and void of any principles whatever; she still possesses the infantine wonder; life is still full of novelty for her; none of the gilding has been rubbed off; she is always making new experiments, and continually breaking out in new directions; she talks a most charming language; she utters the most unexpected sentiments; and she does the most delightful things. She is a flirt, a jilt, a coquette; she is as unreasonable as the wind; she is as uncertain as the weather; she is a doll, a treasure, a toy, an idol, and a little goddess. Of such there are tens of thousands in this land of ours, and I wonder how many of us have the grace to thank God for them!

'Why, Hester'—Lady Mildred was startled at this miracle of beauty—'your child is an angel; she is a fairy. Are all your children like this one?'

'Three of them are,' said Hester. 'They take after their father, who was as handsome,

though undersized, as he was clever. Cleverness it was which ruined him, and his good looks did him no more good than to make him wicked and false.'

'What is her name, Hester?'

'The name, by rights, is Marla, but we call her Polly, because the other is an outlandish name.'

'Why did you call her Marla?'

'It was her father's doing. He would have it, and as I'd my choice with Joe and Sam, I had to give way, though I blushed for shame when I told the clergyman at the font.'

'Marla! It is an odd name.'

'My man, you see, my lady, was fond of his book, and perhaps he found the name in one of the books he was always reading. But there—it doesn't matter now; and I always call her Polly, which is handier and more natural.'

'Yes—it is handier. Do you know, Hester'—Lady Mildred had the child in her arms—'it is strange! Do you know that the child is strangely like my own little girl?'

'Why, good gracious!' Hester threw up her arms in astonishment at her own forgetful-

ness. 'To think that I never even asked your ladyship if you had any of your own! But of course you have. There's the mother in your look, plain to see. Lord! the hunger in a childless woman's eyes!'

'I have only one—a little girl—about this child's age.'

'None but a woman with children of her own,' Hester continued, 'knows how to carry a baby right. Now, to see your ladyship with that little one!'

'Where are your other children? I should like to see them all.'

'I've got four more'—Hester forgot her work and the beautiful drying day in her maternal pride—'four more. First there's Joe. He's sixteen now, and tall for his age. Apprenticed to his father's trade, and handsome, though not clever, as his father was, which gives me hopes for him. It's the stupid lads that turn out the steadiest and do the best. After Joe comes Sam, and he's seven, bless his heart! For sturdiness and appetite there isn't his equal.'

'Nine years between the first and second?'

'Nine years, my lady. Because my husband —he deserted me, I told you—I came away

with little Joe. But he found me out after all those years, and came back to me. And then came Sam. After Sam came Claude.'

'Was that name your choosing, Hester?'

'Lord! no, my lady. I should never have thought of such a fine name for my boy. It was his father's choice. He named the boy after some one in his books—Claude something, who, my husband said, was one of the greatest men who ever lived. But he only seemed to me a rogue and a robber.'

'It could not be Claude Duval?' said Lady Mildred at hazard.

'I think that was the name; but I don't rightly remember. When I took the baby to church I could only remember the first name, so he is Claude, and nothing else. He is six now and a beautiful boy—more like his father than me, and as like as two peas to Polly-which-is-Marla. After him comes Melenda, who is five—another heathenish name. But it's his choice, not mine. She's like Sam, not Claude. Just after Polly was born my husband left me again—thank goodness for it.'

'Do not let us talk about him, Hester,' said Lady Mildred. 'It only vexes you.'

Just then the children came home from school. First came Sam, a sturdy, red-haired child with bright eyes, and a face painfully like his mother's—chiselled hastily and with just a few strokes, rough but effective; the result being a broad forehead, strong chin, large mouth, and rosy cheeks. After him walked Claude—a pretty boy of six, who had very much the air of a gentleman in disguise, though his clothes were tolerably ragged. Last there came a little red-haired girl of five, exactly like her brother Sam. They emerged from the white curtains of drying linen and stood ranged in line before the porch.

'Here they are, my lady,' said their mother, proudly reviewing her family. 'This is Melenda, who's as good as gold already, and can be trusted with Polly. This is Sam. Hold up your head, Sam. It would do your ladyship good to hear that boy read. And this is Claude. He's like his brother Joe and his sister Polly. They all favour their father—in outward looks only, I hope and pray.'

Lady Mildred remarked how she kept recurring to her husband, whose memory she so

much detested. It was as if he was always in her mind.

'Hester,' she said, 'do you alone provide for all these children? Is there nobody to help you?'

'Nobody,' she replied. 'It's terrible hard work, to be sure; and sometimes I wake in the night and think I must break down. And then we shall all have to go to the Union—you can see it from the back of the house—and me and them will be parted.'

'Five mouths to be fed! It must take a great deal of washing to find food for so many.'

'Yes, my lady. But there, I don't mind hard work. There's worse trouble than that for me to be afraid of—worse than hunger even for the little ones—that I dread day and night.'

'Hester,' said Lady Mildred, who still had the youngest in her arms, 'let me help you. Let me take one of the children off your hands. Lend me this little one.'

'Lend you my Polly!'

'Lend her to me, Hester. You can trust her to me. I am not a stranger to you. Let me take the child.'

The mother snatched the little girl out of her visitor's arms.

'Part with my flesh and blood!' she cried jealously. 'Give you my Polly!'

'If you think it would be for her good.'

The woman hugged the child and pressed it closer to her heart, and shook her head. But the tears came into her eyes.

'There is something on your mind, Hester,' Lady Mildred persisted. 'No; do not think that I want to know what it is. There is something you remember and something you dread. When you speak of your dead husband you look about you as if you feared he might be standing at your garden gate. Poor Hester! You must have had an unhappy life.'

'An unhappy life—yes.'

'He is dead and past our blame of it,' said Lady Mildred. 'Yet something survives. The memory——'

'The memory of it,' Hester repeated—'the shame of it, for me and for the children.'

'If you let me have the child, I will bring her up in ignorance. She shall have no knowledge of the memory.'

'Do you want to make her my young lady's maid?'

'No. She shall be brought up with my daughter—her companion; she shall be educated with her. I will provide for her. As for separation from you'— Lady Mildred remembered that if she was to bring up the child as a young lady, Sam and Melenda and Claude might not, in the course of time, be quite desirable companions—' as for separation, you shall know always how she is going on; when she grows up you shall see her again if you wish it; she shall be told about her parentage nothing more than you please to tell her. Think! You will part from the child, but it will be for her happiness, and one less to work for.'

'Oh, my Polly!' cried the mother. 'As if I could think it a trouble to work for your dear little mouth!'

'Think of it, Hester. Take a week, a month, to consider.'

To Lady Mildred's astonishment, Hester decided on the spot.

'You shall have her, my lady. Oh, to save them from what I dread day and night, I would part with them all. Take her—take her. To save her I would consent never to

meet her again till we meet in heaven. Yet—oh, let me keep her just one night—my pretty darling!—to hold her in my arms one night longer.'

'Oh, Hester!' said Lady Mildred, moved to tears. 'I will be like a mother to her. She shall never be unhappy if I can help it. And as for you and yours, whatever happens, you will have a friend in me and mine.'

'Oh, I know—I know. But promise me one thing, my lady. Let the child never learn, whatever happens, unless I tell her—only my boy Joe knows—that my name is only my maiden name; else she'll want to know her father's name. If when she grows up she asks about her mother, tell her that her mother was an honest woman. If she asks about her father, say that he is dead and buried long ago. There are five of them. One of them knows the secret already, but he keeps it close; perhaps the three left with me will find it out, but not Polly—not little Polly-which-is-Marla. God knows I'd never part with her—never—except for that one thing, so long as I'd a finger left to work with.'

'She shall be happy,' said Lady Mildred,

'if I can make her happy. And you shall see her again. Somehow you shall see her. You shall not altogether lose her.'

In this way little Polly-which-is-Marla disappeared from Hackney Marsh, and became Valentine or Violet, I know not which—adopted daughter of Lady Mildred Eldridge, and therefore granddaughter of the Earl of Haslemere, Knight of the Garter, and daughter of the late Sir Lancelot Eldridge, Bart., M.P., F.S.A. This was certainly very great promotion, and, if one may say so of a young lady of this tender age, as yet wholly undeserved.

. . . . . .

'Have I done well, Bertha?' asked Lady Mildred, over the two cribs in which, side by side, the two children were sleeping. Lady Mildred was a woman with many ideas, and Miss Bertha Colquhoun was the friend of her girlhood to whom she communicated them.

'They are curiously alike,' said Bertha; 'one might almost take them for twin sisters. As for your doing a wise thing, my dear Mildred, Time, the only infallible prophet, will disclose when the hour comes. I shall not give my decision till I hear his opinion. As

for your doing an interesting thing, that is undoubted. Tell me, by the way, which is little Trix? I haven't seen her since she was in long clothes; and which is the little washerwoman of Hackney Marsh?'

'Why, nobody knows except myself and my solicitor. I was obliged to tell him. I have changed nurses, and managed so carefully that nobody can so much as guess. The child with the light blue ribbon round its neck is Valentine; the other is Violet. For both of them and for all the world Beatrice is lost, as well as Polly, until October 15, 1885, when Beatrice will come of age.'

'Oh!' said Bertha, disappointed at not being taken into the secret; 'then I must wait like all the world, I suppose. But oh, my dear! Poor little Polly-which-is-Marla! Poor child, when she learns the truth!'

Part II.

THE STROKE OF FATE.

For eight years longer those strong arms worked without rest or pause over the wash-

tub. Time, who possesses an apparently double movement, like a planet, and goes round and about among us while we go straight on, frequently remarked the unchangeable character of this good woman's life, for whom none of his seasons produced either joy or pain, except so far as they brought good or bad drying days. The lines were always up except in rainy weather, and they were always laden, for eight years, during which Mrs. Monument never flagged and never felt weary. In eight years Joe passed from a 'prentice to a workman; at the age of nineteen, like most of his fellows, he took a wife, herself seventeen; by the age of twenty-four he had five children. In eight years Sam advanced from seven to fifteen and became a pupil teacher, being resolved to achieve the position of Board School master. Claude was thirteen, Melenda was eleven, and Polly, of whom from time to time the mother heard the best accounts, was with her sister Valentine, or Violet, ten years of age.

Now, after eight years, Fate suddenly interposed, acting in that decisive manner by which she has always commanded so much respect, and

even fear. It is, in fact, the Oriental style, in which there is no hearing of a case, or pleading, or argument, or jury, or evidence, or court of appeal, or anything at all but the Caliph, the successor to the Prophet—may his soul have peace!—who knows everything, and orders everything, and lo! it is done, whether it be the lopping of a head, or the extermination of a family, or the elevation of a beggar in rags to a purple robe and a seat on a white ass and the post of grand vizier. In this case, as usual, the decree of Fate was final and irresistible. Mrs. Monument began to go blind. First, she became conscious of a curious dimness of vision, whereby the outlines of things were blurred; next she found that this dimness grew upon her; and finally, after the most dreadful apprehensions for the future, she sat down and folded her hands, and made Sam write a letter to Lady Mildred. She had now gone so blind that she could no longer see anything but 'men like trees walking'; she would very soon cease to see them at all; then she would get to the end of her money; then, what would happen to the children?

When Lady Mildred came, in response

to this letter, she was received, so to speak, by a boy who sat in the porch reading. As for the garden, it looked forlorn without the linen: the posts were there, and the lines, but there was no linen, though a most beautiful drying breeze was blowing over the Marsh from the north-east, and there was a warm sun in the sky. Stranger still, there was no smell or steam of soap-suds in the house, and the stricken worker sat in the inner room, hands crossed, in the patient expectant attitude of the blind.

The boy rose and pulled off his hat. Lady Mildred by this time had quite forgotten the child who, at five years of age, had the air and appearance of the descendant of fifty dukes. His face, however, had altered little; it was now a sharp and rather thin face, marked with a strange refinement and delicacy of outline. We do not generally associate such a face with a laundry. We are wrong, of course; because in every city, court, and on every village green, and wherever humans do congregate, there will always be found some child or children with the face of refinement and sweetness, not in the least like the rough and

plain faces round them. A scientific person, I believe, would call them 'sports,' playfully implying that Nature must have her little distractions, and cannot abide for ever to be trammelled with law and rule. Perhaps, however, the scientific person would be wrong, and there may be nothing in man which is not hereditary, down to the cut of a nostril, the outline of a cheek, or the curve of a lip. If Claude's ancestors in the male line were known, for instance, we might trace every feature the boy possessed to some grandfather or great-grandmother. As for his mother's family, it is very well known indeed, and it is a most ancient and a highly honourable house, seeing that every man in it, from father to son, has, from time immemorial, worn the smock-frock or leather jerkin, driven the plough, fed the pigs, sowed and reaped, and sowed again, and has presently shut his eyes and been laid under a little mound of grass in the acre of the Lord. And as for distinction, why the sons of this House fought at Senlac, where they got defeated, after unheard-of bravery, and at Cressy and Agincourt and Bosworth Field, and at Blenheim, and at Waterloo and Alma. Claude

has every reason to be proud of his ancestors by his mother's side. But he did not get his face from any of them, because their faces, though scrupulously honest and sometimes clean, were never either refined or delicate.

'Please, ma'am, my name is Claude,' said the boy, conscious that his name was much finer than Sam's; and indeed it is a very beautiful name, and many a city knight has to put up with one much inferior.

'Claude — yes—I remember you now.' Lady Mildred remembered the story of his baptism. Was he really named after Claude Duval? 'Let me look at you, boy! You are like your sister—Polly. Does your mother tell you about Polly-which-is-Marla?'

'Oh, yes. A fine lady came and took Polly away. Some day we are to see her again, when she comes home for good. She won't be proud, mother says.'

Then Lady Mildred left him and went to see her old nurse. She observed, however, that the boy sat down again and buried his face in his book. 'You poor soul!' she said. 'Tell me all about yourself, and why didn't you send for me before? And what does the doctor say?'

Presently, after the first outpourings concerning the darkened eyes—'And now,' said Lady Mildred. 'about your children. Is Joe doing well? And has he turned out quite as stupid as you hoped?'

'Joe's a good workman, and he's in good work at Tottenham with a plumber and house decorator. He would marry at nineteen, like all the rest of them, and now there's five innocent babies, and she two years younger than himself. But he's a good son always, though he can't help no one but himself.'

'And Sam?'

'He's a pupil-teacher, and gets on wonderful. There never was a boy like Sam for getting on. He's made up his mind to rise in the world, and rise he will. Says he shall be master of a Board School before he's satisfied. Think of that for my Sam!'

'Good boy! And then comes Claude—the little fellow outside in the porch.'

The mother shook her head.

'I don't know what will come to the boy, nor what trade he will take to. For he thinks about nothing but books and reading. Sam reads, too; but then Sam only reads what he

wants, and what will be useful to him. Claude reads everything. Oh, dear, dear! his father was just the same. Always for ever with a book in his hand.'

'Boys who read,' said Lady Mildred, 'often come to great honour. And what about Melenda?'

'She's at school yet. But she gives me a deal of trouble, my lady. I want to get her into good service, in a lady's house. But she won't go. She says all the girls at school are going to be free and independent, and earn their own living by themselves, and so will she. What do they know about it? Give me a good dinner every day, I tell her. That's the first thing. But the girls nowadays are all for freedom, even if they starve with it. There, my lady, that's enough about the children. Tell me how my Polly grows, and if she's a good girl, and pretty behaved.'

It certainly was a very good thing for the Monument family that it found a friend in Lady Mildred at this juncture, when, if it had not been for her, the subsequent history of the family would have belonged to the simple annals of the workhouse. As it was, the

sympathy of Lady Mildred proved of a very practical kind. First it procured for Mrs. Monument a cottage in an almshouse in the Tottenham Road, where she was near her eldest son Joe, and substantial help besides, so that she would be looked after and 'done' for; and, as for Sam, it provided for that boy—though he never knew the fact—the means of continuing his course of study, and enabled him first to become a monitor with five shillings a week and next a pupil-teacher with sixteen shillings a week, and then to go to a training college, and finally to get a place as assistant teacher on ninety pounds a year with a five-pound rise. And as for Melenda, it kept her at school and found her in food and clothes until she refused to stay any more. And as for Claude, I suppose the boy's pretty delicate face and intelligent eyes had something to do with Lady Mildred's kindness to the boy; but she always said it was because she found him a natural lover of learning and devourer of books. At all events, she called him one day and held a very serious conversation with him.

First she asked him what he would like to be.

'I should like,' the boy replied, reddening, 'to go into a bookseller's shop. There's one in the Victoria Park Road, full of old books, where they want a boy.'

'You would not be allowed to read the books. You would only sweep out the shop, put up the shutters, and run on errands.'

The boy's face fell. To sit among books seemed to him the height of happiness. But to sit among books and not be allowed to read them, that would be a fate worse than that of Tantalus.

'You should desire to get on, Claude. The love of reading may help you if you have the other qualities for success. Have you thought of anything else?'

No; he had no other ambitions.

'Now listen. Boys who read and are industrious sometimes get on very well. I fear it may be too late for you to do much, but you can try if you are brave.'

What was he to try? Claude looked at her with great eyes of wonder. 'I will give you a good education. I will take you away from this place and have you taught as much as you can learn. You shall be educated up

to your capacity, whatever that may be.' Claude felt himself, as to capacity, like unto the Great Tun of Heidelberg. His colour came and went; his heart beat and he choked. What was this great happiness that was coming to him? 'When I learn that you have gone far enough, we will consider what you can do for your living. And remember'—she lifted an admonitory finger—'never pretend to be what you are not. You are the son of a working man and a working woman, though you will wear good broadcloth and go to school with boys who may pretend to look down upon you.' Claude wondered what she meant. 'As for your mother, you will go to see her whenever you can, and you will not neglect your brothers and your sister. Your future will depend entirely upon your industry and upon your ability. I think you will show ability, at least. If you do, remember that every avenue to success is open to you. That you will not understand at first. Say it to yourself until you do understand it. Say it when you read of any great man. Never forget it. Though you are a poor lad, you may hope for everything and dare everything.

But you must not be afraid to work and to wait; you must not be afraid of fighting or of speaking out. Above all things, work. Do you understand, Claude?'

The boy's heart glowed within him. But he could not answer. His tongue refused to move. He was frightened as well as dazzled at the prospect before him.

'Will you do your best, Claude?' Lady Mildred asked in a kinder voice.

'Oh! yes, yes,' said Claude, bursting into tears.

'Your best, my boy. Your hardest and your best. You will either see me or hear from me often. I shall always know exactly what you are doing and how you are getting on. Oh! child, you are too young, yet, and too ignorant, to know what a magnificent chance you are going to have, I pray that you may not throw it away. If you do, the mud into which you fall will be Malebolge itself compared with the mud out of which you have been taken.'

The boy understood little of these words except the great fact that he was going to learn unheard-of things; that he was no longer to

wander on the Hackney Marsh, dreaming, but he was to work, something as his brother Sam was working, but with other aims, and, as he vaguely understood, with wider aims. He was to work, to fight, to wait, and to hope. In course of time success would be his. I do not know what were his ideas of success. A boy cannot frame or map out for himself a career; but he can feel that something is to be tried for and something won, and he can imagine for himself some of the glorious sensations of victory. Besides, the boy who accustoms himself to think of the world as something to be conquered, and of himself as a soldier of the future, has already won half the battle. For him there will be no false modesty. When the time comes, he will step into the front rank as one whose place is there, and that by divine right itself.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

AT NINE O'CLOCK.

THERE are many delightful and desirable rooms in London; the Pilgrim who is in Society is continually halting on his way to rest and refresh in these Houses Beautiful. But there can be no more pleasant place than that room in Lady Mildred's town house which the girls had made their own. It was on the ground floor; two windows looked through the foliage of lime, laburnum, and lilac, upon the Park, though with the road between; it had at one end a glass door opening upon a conservatory; it was always filled with the fragrance of flowers; and here the girls kept their own things —their very own—which they prized the most. Valentine had here her favourite piano, with her songs and music; the walls were hung with

Violet's pictures, and there were portfolios filled with her sketches; there were cabinets full of treasures collected in their wanderings—things pretty, things ugly, things quaint, things precious, things worthless—memories of Egypt, Greece, Italy, and France and Germany—wherever the English girl is allowed to wander. It is not yet, but very soon it will become, the fashion for her to visit the States and Canada, the isles of the Pacific, Australia, India, and far Cathay. Therefore the young ladies had nothing from these countries.

About seven o'clock on an evening early in July of the year 1885 the two girls were sitting together in this room, as was not uncommon with them. But it was their wont to be quiet, calm, and restful, as behoves young ladies who believe that life is always to be a long-continued and monotonous happiness in the midst of pretty things and soft cushions. On this occasion, however, they were greatly agitated. One of them, Valentine, was standing; the other, Violet, was sitting at the table. In her hand she held a pencil, and she was rapidly drawing figures on a sheet of paper.

They were about the same age, and that a

youthful age; they were dressed exactly alike —they always dressed exactly alike—and for the evening. If a masculine pen may be permitted to indicate the outlines of their dress, leaving details to be filled up by the imagination of experience, they wore a dainty confection of pale blue silk called, I think, surat, which fell in long folds from the waist, and was caught up at one side showing a lace petticoat, which is a pretty old fashion come back again. The throat was a little open but not much, with folds of lace about it, and there was an arrangement of ribbons and loops about the waist. They were dressed well, in fact, yet with the appearance of simplicity. Their hair was of the light brown hue which is so much beloved by the English youth. Violet's was full of curls and curves and twists, which caught the light and scattered it about as a little waterfall in a mountain brook breaks and scatters the sunshine. Valentine's hair was slightly darker in shade, not curly, but with a wave in it, and in her hair the sunshine lay and rested. They dressed their hair in the same fashion, and that not a common fashion; for it was parted at the side instead of in the middle—or as hairdressers,

ignorant of Euclid, say, in the centre; it is a pretty fashion if there is a pretty face for the hair to encircle, otherwise the commoner methods are preferable. Their eyes were blue in colour, but not quite the same shade of blue; for Valentine's were certainly darker than Violet's, and like the hair, they absorbed the light which Violet's received and reflected: in other words, they were deeper and graver eyes. I would not for a moment suggest that they were more beautiful; that is matter for the jealousy of a lover, and nowhere are comparisons more odious than those concerning beauty. Argument on such a subject is purely vexatious and barren, and wastes the time which should be spent in thankful hymns for the precious gift of loveliness. Always those eyes are the most beautiful which belong to the woman one loves at any moment; and, until he meets his fate, a well-regulated young man should always be in love with somebody. The girls' faces were of the oval type, but, which is a most important distinction, of the shorter oval. The longer oval, in fact, is apt to degenerate into narrowness, with perhaps the expression of a bird of prey; while the shorter

form allows of strength to the chin and breadth to the forehead and amplitude to the cheek. Venus should have an ample cheek as well as a smiling mouth and kindly, gracious eyes. There may be less capacity for philosophy, but there is more for mathematics, music, and the finer feelings in the shorter than in the longer oval. A prolonged residence at Newnham would be necessary in order to carry on this delightful investigation to its legitimate end. And one need not here discuss questions on which even novelists, who are the only true philosophers of modern times, and ought to be the only statesmen, might disagree; besides, these girls were neither philosophers nor mathematicians. They were only girls who had been carefully educated at home, and knew a great many accomplishments and arts, had curiously pretty customs and pleasing manners, and practised, without knowing it, the most charming graces. But they knew no political economy, and they were not brought up to consider themselves bound to consider or to solve any social questions at all.

The girls were about the same height—that is to say, they were fairly tall; their

carriage and bearing were alike; they looked like sisters, and were taken by strangers for twin sisters. There were, however, certain marked differences between them not immediately apparent which the stranger presently observed. Thus, Valentine was somewhat larger in person than Violet; and as to their voices, Valentine's was rich and full, Violet's was low and sweet. And as to their tastes, Valentine was a musician and a singer, while her sister painted with no mean skill, and drew, if not quite so well as Mr. Du Maurier, yet well enough to delight her friends and to please herself. Yet, which is a very curious thing and only to be accounted for by the fact that everybody knew they were not really sisters, it was universally agreed by all their friends that no one could possibly mistake them for sisters. One of them—there never was any concealment of this fact—was the only child of the late Sir Lancelot Eldridge, Baronet and Member for the county, who would probably have got into the Cabinet had his party returned to power in time. But they did not, and he was cut off at sixty-five, which is, for a statesman, early manhood, almost the first flush of spring promise. He

left a quite young widow, Lady Mildred, daughter of the Earl of Haslemere, to take care of his infant daughter. The other girl—there was never any concealment of this fact either—was nothing in the world but the daughter of a mechanical person of the baser sort, a mere working man. She had been adopted by Lady Mildred, no one knew why, and was brought up with her own child. Her true name, though this was not generally known, was Marla, and she had been formerly known in her own rank of life as Polly, for short. One of them, therefore, was a very considerable heiress, and most desirable in point of family connections; the other had nothing at all, and her connections were presumably most undesirable.

'No one will maintain,' said the World, 'that the daughter of a working man and the daughter of a gentleman can ever stand upon the same level. Education can refine, but it cannot change base metal into gold.'

Yes. Unfortunately there was a complication. No one, not even the girls themselves, knew which of the two was the heiress and which the simple working-man's daughter.

'This,' said the World, 'is wicked. Lady Mildred will not speak and no one knows, and there are hundreds of men only waiting to know which is which. Is it right to ignore natural distinctions? Not to know; and it ought to be such a simple thing; and yet it is not possible to tell, and it disturbs all one's ideas. Why the Eldridges have always been remarkable for the beauty of their girls. But these girls are both beautiful. And of course one ought to read old descent in a face. But here both the faces might show long descent. What man would dare to face so terrible an uncertainty? Why he might be marrying into the most dreadful family possible. Was it right, could it be right, of Lady Mildred to take a girl out of the gutter and pretend that she is a lady?

There was once a nymph of surpassing loveliness who offered every one of her suitors a double acrostic, with an alternative: either they guessed it quite correctly without the aid of any dictionary, or if they failed in any one of the lights—it was a frightfully hard acrostic, which wanted both dictionary and encyclopædia and a complete acquaintance with

the whole field of classical literature—that suitor was instantly decapitated, and so made way for another. If, on the other hand, he succeeded, this murderous young person bestowed upon him her blood-stained hand. In point of fact, though history passes it over, only one young man ever offered himself. He was the Prize Acrostic Guesser—the champion. They gave him the thing, in neat hendecasyllabics, and while he was reading it they proceeded to erect the scaffold. But in the confusion and excitement which always attends a coming execution he meanly ran away. In the end this princess died unmarried. There was also another young lady, strong and staying as to wind and limb, who offered to run races with her suitors, on the same terms of death or victory. But Love's Nemesis came upon her too, for no one ever proposed to run with her on those terms, and she presently grew middle-aged and fat, and lamented the days of her beauty and her arrogance, and said that running races was unladylike and ought to have been discouraged long since, and it was wrong of her parents to encourage her. But it was

too late, and now she leadeth apes by a chain. Lady Mildred presented herself and her two girls before society when they were twenty years of age, with a conundrum bearing much the same consequences.

She said, in fact, to the whole of the English youth, 'Young gentlemen, here are two charming girls. They are natural, fresh, and innocent. I have kept them in the country for twenty years, so that they are healthy both in body and in mind. They are as pretty as most girls; they are accomplished; they are frank and they are good-natured; they are amiable, they are even clever. One is my daughter and the other is not; one is an heiress and the other is not. Fall in love, therefore, if you dare. Offer your hands if you dare. You may win a fortune or draw a blank. You may be grandson-in-law to a earl and son-in-law to a baronet, or you may find yourself surrounded by a troop of cousins with paper caps, aprons, bags of tools, sewing-machines, and with manners which generally accompany those emblems of toil. Is love worth such a risk?'

Apparently it is not in this cold and

calculating age. The girls had gone through their first season, and not one man as yet had ventured. This did not disturb them in the least, for they were ignorant of Lady Mildred's conundrum, and their thoughts were not bent on matrimony.

There was not wanting plenty of curiosity. There are always inquisitive persons whose imaginations are fired with every mystery, and can never rest until they know all about it. Some of these tried questioning Lady Mildred, and were coldly snubbed; some even tried the girls, who froze directly the subject was mentioned. But they learned experience, and presently grew wary and recognised the regulation smile of sympathy and the little laugh of apology with which the mystery was always approached. Some examined the various extant portraits of Sir Lancelot—that at eight years of age, that at twenty, that at forty, and that at sixty—and then furtively compared them with the two girls and sucked thereout no profit to themselves, but only more uncertainty; and others gazed upon Lady Mildred and watched her gestures, her carriage, her little distinctive mannerisms, if she haply

had any, and then watched the girls, looking for some little trait in one of them—a turn of the head, a momentary emotion of the face, which might reveal the secret. There were hundreds of these indications. Unfortunately they were as remarkable in one of the girls as in the other. A mother, again, is generally found to show more tenderness towards her own child than to another, but Lady Mildred was tenderness itself towards both the girls; not the least difference could be observed in her manner towards either. Then there is the voice; but here specialists—that is to say, those who remembered Sir Lancelot—differed, because there were some who recognised in Valentine and some in Violet the tones of the late baronet's voice exactly reproduced.

And now the world was waiting. In three months Lady Mildred's daughter would be of age; perhaps the other one as well; but nobody cared about that. It would be impossible then to conceal the thing any longer. The heiress must receive her inheritance; the truth would be known; the parentage of the workman's daughter stand revealed; and the young men could come forward.

'Val,' said one of the girls impatiently, 'I really do believe that the evening of this day will never come.'

'It is much longer than the very longest day of all the year, Violet; my dear, a longer day was never created,' Valentine replied. 'He belongs to both of us, absolutely and impartially, does he not?'

'That is agreed,' Violet replied gravely. 'He is our brother—brother to both of us.'

'If we are to be proud of him,' Valentine went on, 'we are to be proud together. He is our own property—the property of both. If we are to be ashamed of him, we will be ashamed together.'

'Ashamed of him,' Violet repeated. 'I suppose he will be like this.' She had sketched a workman with a bag of tools in his hand, and a paper cap and an apron—a good-looking young workman. 'This is the best chance for us, Val dear. But yet I don't see even in this case that we can be reasonably proud of him, can we?'

'Well,' said Valentine, examining the sketch, 'you have made him look respectable. Labour has its dignity. Can't we be proud of an intelligent working man?'

'Or he may be like this.' She took up another sketch showing the conventional Ælf and 'Arry out for a holiday, arm in arm, roaring and shouting—they are really very rare, these two, though they certainly can be found. 'Or like this'; she showed a young fellow leaning in drunken pose against a lamp-post; 'Or——' here she showed a dreadful, smug young man with fat cheeks and curly whiskers, a frock coat and baggy trousers, and a smile—one of those young men who read scientific books, live on temperance principles, and are virtuous—all with ostentation.

'Don't, Violet,' said her sister. 'Oh, I am sure we shall not be ashamed of him. Mamma would not have asked him to come here if he were like this—or this. But possibly he is a working man—what else can he be? We are only the daughter of one!'

'Perhaps,' said Violet, 'he may know which of us is his sister by some likeness to his father or his mother or himself.'

'Or perhaps he may remember us. We were only two when we were taken from our—other mother; and he is three or four years older; he may remember his little sister.'

'No: not after twenty years. But there may be a something—a family squint—but our eyes are straight; some people have hereditary teeth which stick out—but ours don't; or thick lips—but ours are not thick; or great ears which stick up—but yours are small and lie flat, and so do mine. Oh! there must be something, if it is only a disposition to drink.'

'And then there would be no secret to tell us on the fifteenth of October. If there is anything, Vi, let us keep it to ourselves.'

'I know what I should like to say.' Violet sprang to her feet. 'I should like to say: Brother—this is Miss Beatrice Eldridge—I am your sister. My name is Polly—Polly-which-is-Marla.' For they had heard so much of the family history.

'And I,' said Valentine, 'should tell him that you are quite mistaken, because I have always been convinced in my own mind that I am Polly.'

'There are moments,' said Violet reflectively, 'when I feel unheard-of possible depths.'

'And there are times,' said Valentine, 'when I feel inconceivable basenesses.'

'Of course, the lower classes do feel depths.'

'Of course, my unworthy thoughts are my inheritance.'

'Then both of us,' said Violet, 'must call him brother.'

'And he must call us both sister.'

'The two together only make one sister. Then I suppose we must let him call us by our Christian name. Fancy a carpenter in an apron addressing you as Valentine! Oh! I shall box his ears.'

'Violet'—Valentine dropped her voice and blushed at the thought of the thing. 'Brothers—kiss their sisters. It will be dreadful if——'

'No,' said Violet, firmly. 'Certainly not. No carpenter shall ever kiss me.'

'Sooner or later we shall learn the truth. Till then,' said Valentine, 'the question must not even be raised. Besides, if one hasn't seen one's brother for twenty years, one cannot very well be expected to — oh! Violet, everybody knows the story of the beggar who became a princess, but nobody knows the story of the princess who became a beggar, and put on rags

and wandered about with poor people. Do you think she was ever happy, dear?'

'No,' said Violet, shuddering, 'she was always miserable, and she died young, and of a broken heart.'

'I don't know. Perhaps she was a great joy to the poor people, and was able to do all kinds of things for them. I think I could put on the rags, Violet dear.'

'You never shall. You in rags!' Violet shuddered again. 'But they might be picturesque. You shall put them on, Val dear, and sit to me in them, and I will paint you so, and send the picture, if they will have it, to the Grosvenor.'

'Bertha, stay here this evening. I want you to assist at a Family Function which is to take place at nine o'clock.'

This was in another room—Lady Mildred's drawing-room—and there were present Lady Mildred herself and Miss Bertha Colquhoun, her old friend. Twenty years had passed over their heads. The former had never married again—the latter had never married at all; as regards the ravages of time, Lady Mildred was

no longer young, but she was still comely, and Bertha was of like age, but less comely, because widows wear better than spinsters. It would be unkind to say more.

'What is it, Mildred?'

'I am going, this evening, at length, to make the girls acquainted with their——'

'At last! Oh, Mildred — and you have asked me to learn the truth with them. It is kind of you.'

'Acquainted with—their brother.'

'Oh! But—pardon me, Mildred—is that necessary? Their brother must be, I suppose, quite a common man. Is it well to pain the poor girls with such kinds of associations? I thought they — she — had been quite separated from the family.'

'You shall answer the questions for yourself at nine o'clock, Bertha. Meantime, remember that it wants little more than three months to the time when my child must learn the truth, because she will attain her twenty-first birthday.'

'But why not wait to tell them?'

'Both girls know the story of Polly, but today they heard for the first time that there is a

brother, and that they are to meet him this evening.'

'Poor girls!'

'They are now preparing themselves, I believe, for the reception of a working man.'

'Poor dear girls!'

'And they are encouraging each other to receive him kindly. Before the truth is known to them, you see, they will have time to become fully acquainted with the whole of the other family.'

'Poor Polly! Oh! Mildred, how could you!'

'Why do you pity Polly? She is as well bred as Beatrice: she is as beautiful. I shall not unmake the gentle breeding, though I take away the gentle birth.'

'Still—poor Polly! Will she take her own name?'

'I do not see the necessity. She may just as well remain Valentine — or Violet Eldridge.'

'I suppose the brother will come here straight from the public house, pipe and all?'

'Perhaps.'

'No doubt he will. Poor girls! It is dread-

ful for them. After all these years of culture —of course, for one it will be only a little excitement which will pass in three or four months, and she will be able to reflect that she knew all along that she was Beatrice. But as for the other — I repeat, Mildred, poor Polly! However, you have forgotten one thing.'

'What is that?'

'Why in introducing their brother you will betray the secret, because the girls will find out the truth—everybody will find it out—from his likeness to one of them. So I shall be the first to learn the secret after all.'

The four ladies dined together, but it was a silent banquet. The girls, for their part, said nothing at all, but looked at each other and at the clock. At half-past eight they adjourned to the drawing-room. The brother was to be introduced at nine. The girls, as the clock drew nearer to the hour, clasped each other by the hand, while Lady Mildred and Bertha fell into silence or only exchanged a word at intervals. And oh! how slowly moved the minutes!

At nine in the evenings of early July it is

not dark, but only a little overshadowed, and there is quite light enough to discern faces, which is all that is necessary for conversation. You may talk in the dark, but, as Charles Lamb once remarked, it is inconvenient having to feel your companion's face for the responsive smile. As the clock struck the hour the door was thrown open.

'Mr. Claude Monument!'

The girls caught at each other and gasped. Lady Mildred rose. In the door stood a young man who looked about him with troubled eyes.

'Good Heavens!' Bertha murmured, but I think everybody heard her. 'The creature is a gentleman!'

Yes. He had on the outward garb of a gentleman, and he carried himself with the outward bearing of a gentleman. It was a rude thing for Bertha to say, but her mind was full of working men and pipes and aprons and the smell of beer, and she was surprised into rudeness, and she hoped that nobody would notice it. Now, there certainly was never yet in any history or in any country a carpenter or a smith or a working man of any kind who ever

had a dress coat to put on unless it was to go out as a waiter in the evening. Could the young man be a waiter?

'My children,' said Lady Mildred, taking the young man by the arm, 'here is your brother; Claude, this is your sister, Valentine and Violet.'

'Good Heavens!' cried Bertha for the second time, as she pressed forward and peered curiously into his face. 'Why, the man is just like both of them!'

CHAPTER II.

WHICH IS MY SISTER?

Lady Mildred touched Bertha on the arm, and they left the three together.

'Which of you,' asked Claude, looking from one to the other, 'which of you is my sister?'

The girls held each a hand and gazed into his face with wondering eyes, which met eyes of equal wonder. Neither of them answered, but all those wondering eyes softened and became humid. Is it a small thing, think you, for two girls to be unexpectedly presented with a grown-up brother? And that brother so desirable in outward looks? Is it a small thing for a young man, especially a young man who has been lifted from the lower to the higher levels, to be presented with a sister who has been similarly transplanted, and to outward seeming has proved equal to the change? To

be sure he had already a sister, but she was Melenda, and two brothers, but one was Joe and one was Sam.

Claude saw before him two girls, beautiful exceedingly and strangely alike each other; Nature, as we have already heard, having been so good as to lend a most generous assistance to Lady Mildred. He thought of Melenda. Good Heavens! if one of these was his own sister and the other Lady Mildred's daughter—and the features of both in the soft summer twilight had the same delicacy, their eyes the same purity, their lips the same sweetness—how could one of these girls be his own sister, and the sister of Melenda? The girls, for their part, saw a young man with straight and regular features, broad forehead, resolute lips, and steady, serious eyes—a young man, somewhat slight in figure, but well shaped and of grave expression—and they were overwhelmed. This was their brother, like one of themselves they thought, the child of a London working man. By what arts had he been transformed into a gentleman?

'Which of you,' he repeated, 'is my sister?'

'We do not know, Claude,' said Violet, thinking guiltily of her sketches.

He turned to the other girl.

'We do not know,' Valentine repeated.

'You do not know? Lady Mildred told me yesterday that she would give me a sister.'

'We do not know,' said Violet, for the third time; 'we thought that perhaps you would recognise your sister, or might know her by some likeness to—your father, for instance.'

'I do not remember my father. He has been dead a great many years. I have forgotten my sister entirely, and I was never told that Lady Mildred had taken her.'

'Claude,' said Valentine, 'we must both be your sisters.'

'I will tell you,' said Violet, 'Polly's history brought down to this very day. Listen. She was found by Lady Mildred nineteen years ago, and was taken from her playground, which was also the drying yard, for her mother was a washerwoman. I never see linen hanging out to dry without thinking of that day. She was playing hide-and-seek all by herself among the wet sheets, no doubt catching a dreadful cold, when she was found and carried away. She

was a pretty child, and curiously like little Beatrice. Well, she was educated with Beatrice, and no difference at all was made between them, and they were called Valentine and Violet, but they knew all along that one was Beatrice and the other was Polly. They had the same masters, they learned the same things, and had the same friends. And now we are grown up and have come out, and people when they don't know the story—but they are very few—think us sisters, and say there is no doubt about our descent from the illustrious house of Eldridge. It would be for some girls awkward to explain, but we are used to it, and now point out without any confusion that one of us is Beatrice Eldridge and the other is Polly—what is the name Claude? I did not quite catch your name, which we have never been told.'

'Monument.'

'Monument.' Violet considered the name for a moment. 'Monument. It might have been worse. Monument. Fancy being a Monument! Little Trix has grown into tall Beatrice—we are both exactly the same height. Little Polly has also grown into big Polly,

which is short for Marla, her real name—we know that part of the family history too.' Claude thought that he could perceive the least possible vein of bitterness under this bright talk, but then he was naturally sensitive about his reception. 'Don't forget, Claude,' she added, 'that we think quite as much about Beatrice as about Polly. Do we not, Val?'

'Quite as much,' replied Valentine, gravely; 'we must not be ashamed of Beatrice because she has not the same picturesqueness of birth as her sister. Please, Claude, get into the habit of remembering that Violet is really Beatrice, and that I am your very own sister. I am sure of it. Why, I actually remember playing about among the clothes. I think—but I am not quite sure—that I remember the cold I caught.'

'She is quite wrong, Claude,' Violet interposed. 'When I shut my eyes I can really see the wet sheets, and if you want any further proof you will very soon find yourself looking to Valentine for everything which requires the instinctive impulse of generosity.'

'Oh! Violet!'

'Is it possible? You do not know?' he repeated.

'We do not know,' they assured him together, and for the fourth time.

'Then what are we to do?'

The girls looked at each other and shook their heads. What were they to do? The situation was embarrassing, but it was what they expected.

'We had made up our minds before you came what we were going to do. You will have to treat us as if we were both your sisters, until you find out which of us it is, and after that we will consider the position again. But,' said Violet, clasping her hands, 'oh! the joy and comfort of having a brother so promising as you! My dearest Val, think how very, very few brotherless girls like you and me ever get such a chance as a full-grown brother given to them, and a brother too—who—looks,' she spoke quite slowly and with a sigh of relief between each word, 'who—looks—as—if—we—should—actually—be proud of him.'

Claude blushed, but it was growing too late to see that lingering note of youth.

'You might have come home from a desert

island, Claude, after you had been wrecked and been given up for lost for nineteen years. But then there would have been a sweetheart waiting for you—they always have a sweet——oh! but perhaps there is——'

'No,' said Claude, laughing, 'there is not.'

'I am very glad, because we shall have you all to ourselves. You might have been brought to us when you were a schoolboy, and then you would have tortured and plagued us. You might have been kept back for another ten years, and then we should have been old women. Oh! it is much better as it is. You will try to like us, won't you?'

'Will you try to like me?' Claude replied, 'and not expect too much of me?'

'You will tell us presently'—it was always Violet who continued to talk. She was a little flushed, and her eyes were brighter than usual. 'You will tell us presently,' she said, 'how is it that you have become a—a gentleman.' Then, as if fearing that she might have given pain, she added, 'Because sons of working men do not often look and speak like you.'

'I will tell you presently,' he replied.

'Did you think I should come straight from a workshop?'

'This is what Violet drew,' said Valentine, showing him the sketches; 'we pictured the very worst you see.'

'I see,' said Claude, laughing. 'But the sketches are delightful. May I take them? Thank you. Well, then, let us sit down, and I will tell you all about it.'

So they sat down, and he, like Æneas, began his moving tale, and they, like two twin Didos, listened. When he mentioned the trade of his father and the calling of his mother, Violet begged him earnestly not to speak of those things if they were painful to him. He declared, however, and it seemed strange to her, that it was not in the least painful to him to feel that his mother had been a washerwoman. To think of one's own mother earning her bread at a wash-tub!

Claude carried on his narration into his schooldays, where he fought his way to the front and won scholarships and prizes.

'I know now,' he said, 'why Lady Mildred came to see me and why she fired me with ambition. Once she took me to the theatre,

and between the acts asked me if I would rather be one of the actors on the stage or the author of the piece or one of the gentlemen in the stalls, because if I wished I could become any one of them. And once she took me into the Park in her carriage and showed me the great people, and asked me if I wished to be one of them, because I could if I wished. And again she took me to a court of justice, and asked me if I would like to be the counsel pleading in the case, or the judge who heard it, because it depended wholly on myself. And then to a church where there was a bishop preaching, and she asked me if I would like to be a bishop. Always as if the highest was within my reach if I chose. So that I never felt as if the accident of obscure birth was going to be an obstacle in my way. And indeed it has not been any hindrance, so far.'

'That was like her,' said Valentine, 'to fill you with noble ambitions.'

'And besides, my mother was no longer a laundress, and I came, no doubt through Lady Mildred's promptings, to think of her courage and steadfast love and the whole life that she gave freely to her children.'

'Yes, Claude,' said Violet meekly.

'It was through Lady Mildred that I learned to love the hard work which was to be my ladder. I owe everything—everything—to her. And now I owe a sister.' He offered, with a little shyness, a hand to each.

'And what are you now, Claude?'

'I am a barrister of the Inner Temple, newly called, and as yet without a brief or a client; but they will come.'

'He is a barrister, Val—oh!'

'And I am a Fellow of Trinity.'

'Oh! Violet, he is actually a Fellow of Trinity!' They clasped hands of admiration and of joy. Could they have hoped or dreamed of such a thing?

'Now you know all. I am something of a scholar and a good deal of a student. And I have enormous ambitions, of which I will tell you another time if I may.'

'Tell us everything,' said Valentine; 'do not have any half confidences with us. Tell us all about yourself. It is something only to know what a man's ambitions are. Remember we have some right to your confidences. We are your sisters, Claude.'

'You shall have all my confidences. But do not expect too much of me. Do not be disappointed in me. As far as I have gone, it is certainly true that no one could have done much more than I have done. I am Fabri Filius, son of a smith, so entered in the college books. The University is open to all the world, but of course everybody understands that if the son of a working man enters, he should justify his admission.'

'You have already justified yours, then,' said Valentine. 'Oh! Claude, we are proud of you.'

'But how am I to justify my admission?' asked Violet. 'Because I am also *Fabri Filia* —that is good Latin—the daughter of the smith? Don't shake your head at me, Valentine dear, or I will call you Beatrice at once and for good. You see, Claude, Val and I have double the number of ancestors. For instance, we have four grandfathers instead of two. Two of them used to wear straw round their legs and smock frocks, and they said all day, "Gee—who! a!" The dear old men! And as for the other two, one tied a beautiful blue garter round his leg, and had a gold collar to

hang round his neck, and on grand occasions he put a gold coronet on his head; and the other was a baronet, and lived in a great house, and voted solidly with the Conservatives. This wealth of grandfathers naturally makes us proud. But you have no share in two of them, poor boy!'

Claude laughed.

'I have tried to persuade myself,' he said, 'that it makes no difference at all what a man's birth may have been. But of course I don't quite believe it. I am always measuring my own stature with that of my friends, and asking myself if I stand on their level as regards—what constitutes a gentleman. If I do not, forgive me and help me.'

'But you do,' said Valentine; 'of course you do.'

'Any man may make himself a scholar and a Fellow of Trinity, and even a great barrister, but I am not certain whether any man may make himself a gentleman. Do you think that after any kind of intellectual success, even the highest, a man may ever be able to say to himself, "I am a gentleman at last; I

have the instincts as well as the training of a gentleman"?'

'You have them already,' said Valentine, confidently; 'one can see them in your face.'

'The family name is Monument,' said Violet quietly.

'Quite so.' Claude replied; 'and the name is associated with memories. Did not Lady Mildred tell you anything about your family?'

'Nothing except my father was a smith and that my own name is Marla or Polly.'

'Now tell us,' said Valentine, 'about the family. Have we any other relations besides yourself, Claude?'

'My dear,' said Violet, 'should we enquire further than is necessary? There must be cousins by hundreds. But go on, Claude.'

'First there is my mother.'

'Oh!' both cried out. Then their other mother was living.

'She is blind, and has ceased to work for many years. She is now in an almshouse.'

'Claude, you cannot suffer her to stay there.'

'She is happier there. Lady Mildred

made me promise to let her stay. Do not be ashamed of the almshouse.'

'Poor mother!' said Valentine; 'blind, and in an almshouse.'

'One would much rather have heard,' said Violet, 'that she was the widow of a retired officer and living nicely in a villa at Southsea. But if she is happy—go on, Claude. Is our father living—in another almshouse?'

'No; he is dead,' said Claude gravely. 'We ought to be proud of my father. He was clever in his trade; he was sober and industrious; he was honest and respected: what more can one ask of one's father? Joe remembers him well. It is from Joe that I have heard about my father. He was but a working man, but I am proud of him.'

'We will be proud of him too,' said Valentine, though as yet she saw little room for pride in a father who only possessed the very simple virtues of honesty, industry, and skill. You perceive that she was deplorably ignorant of the world, where we are constantly brought to a standstill and provoked into wrath just by the lack of these very simple qualities.

'Did Polly,' Violet continued, 'have any

other brothers and sisters? She hopes on the whole that she did not, because it is impossible they could all be so nice as you, Claude.'

'She had two other brothers and one sister. First there is Joe.'

'My brother Joe. It sounds oddly at first. Joe—Joseph—Joe. I think Joseph—no, Joe—is better. We will call him Joe, Val. He is no doubt a working man.'

'He is the eldest and is a locksmith, as his father was before him. He is now six-and-thirty years of age, though he looks older.'

'Is he—does he—go about with that red handkerchief round his throat that we were talking of?'

'Joe is a smith'—Claude evaded the question—'and he works for a builder and decorator. Of course he looks like what he is—a working man.'

'Things are being brought home to us, Val,' said Violet. 'Go on, Claude.'

'He is a good-natured man and he has ten children.'

'Ten children? They are our nephews and nieces. The world,' said Violet, 'is growing wider.'

'He married, like most working men, at nineteen. There is one good point about Joe—he is careful of his mother, whom he never forgets.'

'And after Joe?'

'Then there is Sam, ten years younger. He is the master of a Board School, and is unmarried. He is clever, and has read and has ideas. In fact he has too many ideas, and he holds them perhaps too strongly.'

'Do you see much of your brothers, Claude?'

'No, very little. They think I have no part or lot with them any longer, and Sam resents my trying to turn myself into a gentleman. Perhaps it was absurd to try. He is unfortunately prejudiced against all the people who wear good clothes and have white hands.'

'Is Sam like you to look at?'

'No, not in the least. Sam has red hair and is short. He is remarkable to look at, however, because he is always in earnest, and he looks strong.'

'I think I shall like Sam,' said Valentine, thoughtfully. 'He seems more interesting

than Joe. Every man ought to be brave and strong.'

'Sam is very interesting,' said Claude. 'Especially when he is in a rage.'

'Are there any more?'

'There is only Melenda. She is a seamstress, and she lives with two or three girls who do the same kind of work. She is free and independent, she will receive no advice and will endure no restraint, and she regards me with contempt because I am not a workman. At present I do not exactly know where she is living, because she has ordered me never to see her again. But I can find her out.'

'You must find her out,' said Valentine.

'In the matter of cousins now,' said Violet, with resignation.

'I dare say there are hundreds of cousins, but I do not know of any. The working people of London do not, as a rule, keep up cousinships. A family dropped down into this great city very easily gets scattered and dispersed.'

'Perhaps it is as well,' said Violet. 'Claude, do not despise me. We knew something of all this before, of course, but only in general terms,

and thus have become romantic. The plain facts are overwhelming at first. I feel shivery. It is most delightful to have a brother who is a gentleman and has distinguished himself. But——'

'Our other family,' said Valentine, 'seemed always so far away. And now they have suddenly become so near.'

Then there was silence while a man might count twenty.

'They are not really nearer to you than they were before,' said Claude. 'You have not been taken to see them. You need not seek them out.'

'Claude!' said Valentine, reproachfully.

'You tell us we have another mother living, and you say we need not go to see her,' said Violet.

'Our own mother—the only one we know,' Valentine went on, 'has brought you to us. She means by your means to make us known to all our unknown relations. Claude, five or six years ago she wrote us a letter—it was addressed to us both, but it was meant for Polly. "Close beside us," she said, "unknown to us, are those who toil their lives away while

we live at ease: they waste and expend themselves in drudgery while we cultivate both minds and soul. Do not forget that one of you belongs to them in a sense which the other does not. If, hereafter, you go among them, remember the old ties, and be full of love and compassion for them, for they are your brothers and sisters. Your brother's sin is your disgrace: your sister's shame is yours." Violet, you remember that letter?'

'As if I could ever forget it,' she replied, gravely.

'You see, Claude,' Valentine explained, 'the feeling that we are not really sisters has made us more than sisters. One of us is a girl —oh! so humble and so poor—and the other is so rich and so well born. And by this knowledge we are drawn together more closely than if we had been children of the same parents. Always and all day long, we have Polly with us—Polly-which-is-Marla.'

'Always with us,' said Violet.

'She goes with us wherever we go; we look in each other's eyes and see, reflected there, her image: the shade of Polly is always with us; she has grown up with us; she has

been always like us in face and height; but when we try to picture her as she would have been if she had been left among her friends—then Claude, Violet, and I cannot agree.'

'I know very well what she would have been,' said Violet. 'I have seen her in the street. She would have a great lump of hair upon her forehead, and she would wear a grey ulster or a red crossover; she would laugh very loud and she would walk three abreast——'

'Oh, no,' said Valentine, 'Polly would be dressed like other workgirls, I suppose, but she would be a gentle creature full of sweet and generous thoughts.'

'Who would have put them in her mind?' asked Violet. 'Do sweet thoughts grow in girls' working rooms? Claude, what do you think? Could Polly be in the least like Valentine?'

It was nearly twelve when Claude left them. They had been sitting without lights at the open window looking across upon the Park. The room was full of moonlight strong enough to suppress the lamp before the house as the electric light puts out the yellow light

of gas; their hearts glowed within them; the eyes of the girls were soft with sympathy and newly born love; the young man's pulse beat faster and his cheek burned, as he took their hands.

'Claude,' said Valentine, 'tell us—always—everything.'

'He will,' said Violet. 'He trusts us already. Oh, Claude, you have made us so happy.'

When he was gone, the two girls fell into each other's arms.

'Val,' said one. 'He is my very own—my brother to myself. But you may love him too.'

'Oh, Violet,' said the other. 'That poor blind woman in the almshouse, who worked so hard. She is, I am sure, she is my mother.'

CHAPTER III.

JACK CONYERS.

Some among us—not all—have been young. They will remember how, in one or two supreme moments, they have been carried out of themselves with a joy which can never be felt in its fulness after five-and-twenty—the intoxicating, dazzling joy in the prospect of life-long happiness.

It falls upon one, perhaps, when love has been whispered and returned: perhaps, when the first success has been achieved: more often when some kindly Prophet has foretold to trembling youth the success which his heart desireth. That Prophet shall be regarded ever after with love and gratitude, and a respect unspeakable for his gifts of discernment. Why are there so few of them? There ought to be a school of these prophets, their sole duty to prophesy, for every deserving youth,

good fortune, distinction, contentment, joy, and wealth, with an eternity of happiness hereafter in the Elysian Fields. Everybody feels capable of deserving, and of perpetually enjoying all these rewards and more.

There never was, in the whole history of mankind, such an occasion for rejoicing as that presented to Claude. It was the greatest thing that had ever happened to him: greater than the first scholarship: greater than his place in the Tripos; greater than his fellowship: greater than his ambition.

Consider; it is a youthful instinct to impart confidence and to expect sympathy: boys, students, undergraduates, young men of every sort, in obedience to this instinct, confide greatly in each other. After examinations passed, degrees obtained, and the college walls exchanged for the wide world, which always turns out to be a coldish kind of place, young men grow less sympathetic with each other and more reticent about themselves; they exercise selection in their confidences; they even abstain altogether from talking about their personal ambitions, just as, about the same time, they cease to speak of poetry,

religion, and other things which I suppose they consider too sacred for common speech. Every man makes in his heart an Adytum of the Temple which grows more full as he grows older. Only the priest is by law allowed to enter into this holy of holies, but he generally takes with him a companion, who is always of the other sex—his sister, sweetheart, or wife. The sympathy of sisters, indeed, is always ready to be had for the asking, and perhaps, on that account, like everything else easily attained is less valued than it should be. Many young men, however, prefer the sympathy of other people's sisters, and this also is, to do these young ladies justice, ready as a rule when properly asked for.

Alone among his fellows, Claude had no home circle which could understand him and could follow his career with interest. Every day since that on which he first left them seemed to separate him more and more from his own people. He had long since left off telling them, because they could not understand it, what he was doing. His mother knew nothing about Cambridge, and had never

heard of Trinity, though the fame of every individual fellow of that College, as all the resident fellows know very well, is trumpeted abroad, with mighty blast, from Pole to Pole, and fills the round world with wonder and admiration; he knew few people; it was two years since he had taken his degree, and his old school and college friends were already scattered: among all the millions of women, old and young, which inhabit London and England, there was not one whom he could call either friend or mistress; not one to whom he could open his heart.

He was used to this isolation: it was a necessary part of his position; at school, when other boys got prizes, their mothers and sisters and all their people were present to congratulate them; when he went up to receive his prizes there was not a single person in the room whose eyes softened and whose heart glowed at the sight of his triumph. When he was head boy and carried off no end of prizes, the other boys cheered and some of the spectators remarked audibly upon his singular beauty—for it was a comely lad—and he went home

to his boarding-house with a cartload of books and an aching heart because of his loneliness. Even Joe, brother Joe, the plumber's man, in his working-dress, would have been something. At Trinity he won an entrance scholarship and afterwards a University scholarship and a City Company's scholarship, and with these helps paid his own college expenses easily, and there was no one to say, 'Well done!'—not even Lady Mildred, who contented herself with an expression of satisfaction, and when he concluded his student course with a fellowship, reminded him, in the days of his first pride, and just as if anybody who chose could be a Fellow of Trinity, that this was nothing more than the first step. Young men, she added, may show promise by taking University distinctions, but they are by themselves of little importance. Claude must take care not to think that anything real had been achieved. Not one single person in the world to whom he could open his heart.

And now he had a sister—two sisters—one rolled out into two—both as beautiful as the day and as sweet as the roses in June, and they were proud of him. For the first time in his

life he realised how well he had already done, since he could make two such girls proud of him ; and he wondered how he could possibly have done it, alone, and without a single word of congratulation and encouragement on the lonely hard road he had travelled.

He stalked along the crowded pavement seeing no one, his head full of these thoughts, his chin in the air. A hand was laid on his shoulder.

Claude pulled himself together and took the other hand which was held out.

'You in London, Jack?'

'Yes. I am in London. I have been here for two or three weeks. Come to my chambers —they are close by—and let us talk.'

Claude was not inclined to talk about anything except perhaps about Valentine and Violet, but he followed his friend.

'Where have you been for the last two years?'

'I have been travelling—studying—sketching. One must travel, you know.'

The chambers were furnished after the modern fashion : there were cabinets with china : there were water colours : there was

glass: there were skins and rugs; they were clearly rooms belonging to a man of taste.

The name of Jack goes with almost any kind of character. It suits a soldier or a statesman: a poet or a mechanician: a prince or a pauper: a hero or a humbug. It requires only one quality—that its possessor must be accepted on his own terms by his contemporaries: not that he must necessarily be popular, but he must be believed in. When Jack Conyers, in his first term, announced himself as one of the coming men, the lads about him accepted him on trust. He *was* the coming man—his manners rather than his words or his acts proved it. He had, to justify these pretensions, a good name and a good presence to begin with; he did nothing actively to encourage or to justify the belief, except perhaps that he understood the power of Silence; he did not chatter, as many young men do, but when he spoke, it was slowly and quietly, as if what he had to say was worth hearing; nor was he like so many young men carried away by any enthusiasms of the hour, and he was always critical. Also, he did not laugh much, though he understood and practised the fine and subtle art of

smiling, an art in which women generally excel; but Jack Conyers excelled all women. It was not exactly known who and what were his people, but it was understood that he was of good family; he had the appearance and manner of one who has money; he did not court intimacies; he dressed well, and he seemed to know London. Reading for the Senate House was, he said, narrowing to the mind which desires culture more than scholarship; therefore, he took an ordinary degree; he had a piano in his rooms, and played and sang a little; he also painted and sketched a good deal, and it was supposed that his career, of which he spoke continually, though vaguely, was to be connected in some way with Art.

In appearance he was of the middle height and thin. He wore a *pince-nez*: his features were regular and delicate; his eyes were good, though rather hard, as if always on guard; his mouth was well formed, but the lips were too full, and his forehead was high and narrow. Not an effeminate-looking man, but evidently one who desired to appear refined and studied attitude as well as dress, and his surroundings as well as his manners. If he had been asked

what he most desired to convey in his appearance he would have confessed—if he did confess—that he wished to look like a young man who is going to succeed. Claude was one of the men of his own standing who believed in him. Some there were, I regret to say, who scoffed at the name of Conyers.

The room was lit by a shaded lamp. Upon the mantel-shelf there stood three small portraits side by side. They were oil sketches, and represented three girls' faces, all evidently painted by the same hand.

'You are looking at those heads,' said Jack Conyers. 'They are portraits—such as they are—of three women'—he sighed—'three women—poor things!—who were so good as to complete my education.'

'How did they do that?'

'By letting me fall in love with them. A man, I have discovered, cannot be a finished artist without a full personal experience of passion. How can he express what he has never felt? Yet, for an artist, Love should be a memory rather than a living thing, and therefore each experience should be short. This was a French girl, vivacious, full of *espièglerie*;

this was an Italian, the mere creature of passion; this a Roumanian. Woman, as mistress or as wife, in the boudoir or the salon, should form part of every Career.'

Pelham or the great D'Orsay could have said no more. Claude, however, asked no more questions about the portraits, though doubtless there was a whole chapter belonging to each.

'And what are you going to do?'

'I have taken a studio and I am going to begin my Work.'

It seemed rather a drop for the vagueness of coming greatness to take the concrete and even common form of a studio.

'As for my success——'

'Of course you will succeed,' said Claude.

'I do not know. The common success—the adulation of the crowd—does not attract me. I shall never stoop to paint half a dozen pictures in a year. Perhaps one in four or five, or even ten years. The picture which I have in my mind has been growing for at least five years, during which I have filled my soul with it. The subject has been part of myself. Claude——' he raised his finger impressively;

'it will be, I am assured, a great picture; there will be in it, at least, the whole soul of the artist.'

Claude murmured indistinctly something to the effect that a picture with a soul in it would be indeed worthy of his friend's reputation.

'Hitherto the picture, as it exists in my mind, has been incomplete for want of one face. But I have found it at last. I discovered it in a People's concert where I was made to sing by Lady Aldeburgh—a concert somewhere near a place they call Shoreditch; after the concert I talked to the girl who owns the face, which is as yet sadly incomplete; she is ignorant but apparently open to emotions. I shall get that girl. I shall take her away from her belongings and cultivate her face. Everything shall be sacrificed to the cultivation of the face. She wants to be well fed and kept in soft silk and made dainty with fancy dresses and idleness and pretty things, and then that face will grow and develop like a rosebud. At present, I admit, it is imperfect, but it is a possibility, and it will make my picture. The eyes are there, already, and they are full of possible poetry and passion.'

He spoke with something nearly approaching enthusiasm.

'Can't you paint her without wanting to take her from her people?'

'No, I want her taken away altogether from the place where she lives. She must be placed wholly under artistic influence—she must be mine—my model—the slave of Art.'

'Wouldn't it be better, perhaps, for the girl's reputation for her to stay where she is?'

'Philistine! I want her in the interests of Art. She is needed. One can't stop to think about the reputation of a girl in comparison with——'

'Don't, Jack. My own relations, you know, are somewhere about those levels, and they have reputations which they seem to value even more than the interests of Art.'

Jack hastened to change the subject. When you touch on the reputation of a man's possible sisters you tread on dangerous ground.

'I saw you coming out of Lady Mildred Eldridge's, but you walked so fast that I could not overtake you for ever so long. She is a friend of yours?'

'Yes, my best friend.'

'I met them in Florence last winter. I was able to be of some little service to them—one of the girls sketches cleverly. They are both, in fact, pleasing.'

'Thank you,' said Claude, with a conscious blush; 'one of them is my sister.'

'What?' Jack Conyers started in his chair and dropped his cigarette. 'What? One of them your sister?' He knew, like all the world, the history of the two girls in general terms, how one was an heiress and the other the daughter of a working-man. 'One of them your sister? My dear fellow, they are both—allow me to say it—both most beautiful and accomplished young ladies. You are a lucky man, and I congratulate you. Which of them is it?'

'I do not know which. My sister was adopted by Lady Mildred nineteen years ago, and the secret has been kept ever since.'

'But you will find out. This is not the kind of thing which is kept hidden. There must be some points of resemblance; your father, for instance——'

'He is dead, and my mother is blind.'

'At all events you are sure to find out before long.'

'I dare say I shall, or else I shall be told.'

'It is rather like the end of a Latin comedy.'

'Yet it is only the beginning of an English comedy. You know my history, Conyers. Everybody does. When men meet me for the first time they whisper to each other, "Son of a working man, you know." I do not hear the words, but I read them in their eyes. That is nothing. But I have been rather a lonely man——'

'Naturally,' said Conyers, trying to look as if he entirely sympathised with him, 'naturally.' But he was thinking which of the two girls more nearly resembled his friend.

'And I can hardly try to make you understand what a tremendous thing it is to have a sister at last — a sister who takes an interest and—and—even a pride in one.'

'Well,' said Jack, 'for my own part I never wanted any brothers and sisters. They divide the money and they give all kinds of trouble. But from your point of view no doubt you are

right. It must be a bore not to have any belongings.'

Claude laughed and prepared to go.

'I have belongings, to be sure, but not of the kind which you would understand.'

'That is very conceivable, and I am very sorry for you. I find any other class than our own impossible to talk with and uninteresting to study. Well, I am very glad we met to-night, my dear boy. Come often—come as often as you can, and tell me when you have found your sister. Let me share your secret. Valentine or Violet — I knew that they were assumed names. Tell me when you have found out which of them it is.'

'Certainly I will. Good-night.'

Jack Conyers, left alone, prepared for himself and drank a lemon squash. Then he sat down and meditated with a mixture of gloom and hope in his countenance. When a young man leaves the University at two-and-twenty, resolved upon distinction and yet uncertain which path to choose — when he wanders about for two years purposeless—when he returns determined upon a career in Art, as painters arrogantly call their profession, as if a novelist or a

poet is not also an artist—when, further, he remembers that Art is not always lucrative —that one may have to wait long before making a name, and that meanwhile no money is coming in—when, lastly, there will arise at midnight spectres of doubt which point the finger and say, 'Yah! you will never succeed, even by a trick'—when, at the same time, one has conceived a way, a trick, by which to take the town by storm and has actually found the face with which to do it—there is room for the play of a good deal of mixed emotion.

Presently he saw a letter lying on his table. He took it up and looked at the handwriting and tore it open.

'My dear Jack'—he read it quickly as if to get through it and have done with it—'you have been back three weeks and you have not been to see me. Very well. Sooner or later I suppose you will come. I can wait, my dear boy. I know very well why you said you loved me, and I know all about your money matters. Go on. Within six months you will hang up your hat in my hall and be happy ever after. I shall have the money, but you shall have full liberty and a handsome

allowance. I am not in the least jealous, because I am always certain of the person whom alone you love — go look at him in the glass. When you have found out that you cannot get on without me, you will repent of your negligence and come. When we settle down we will give dinners, and you shall play at being a distinguished man and I at being the appreciative and devoted wife, and we shall suit each other very well. I saw your sisters the other day. If I were you I would sometimes call upon them. Good-night, my Jack. Your affectionate Alicia.'

Jack read this letter through. Then he burned it, because every word was true, and truth is best hidden in a well or behind the bars of the fireplace.

'If I could find out somehow, through Claude, which of them it is,' he thought, 'and if I could do this without his knowing, I should have such a chance as might make me free of Alicia yet. She always had the most disgustingly coarse way of putting things, and she's getting coarser every day.'

Jack's Cambridge bed-maker, who loves reminiscences almost as much as an old states-

man, maintains that Mr. Conyers, though a liberal gentleman, and one who kept a deal of company, was of the sort which thinks of nobody but theirselves. Bed-makers have great experience of young men, and their opinions should be received with weight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAVEN OF REST.

I SHOULD like to sing a song of Almshouses —not so much of those great havens of rest with their spacious courts and old chapels and broad gardens which are scattered about this realm of England, as of the London almshouses. They vary from the poor little half-dozen cottages in a row—like Lady Came's, which are so small that the residents are elected by competitive measurement, character not being so much an object as smallness of stature—to the new and stately palaces such as those at Wood Green, or the old and dignified college such as that beyond Greenwich Hospital, or that of Morden, beside Blackheath; and in wealth, from a little endowment of four shillings a week and a two-roomed cottage for four old women, to an annuity of forty pounds a year,

with lodgings, coals, and light for as many old men. There are quiet and peaceful almshouses even though they stand beside noisy thoroughfares. Could anything be sweeter and more peaceful than Amyas's Houses, lying lost and forgotten behind Old Street? or than Beeman's at the back of the Kingsland Road, or the Trinity Almshouses in the midst of Whitechapel? And there are others which seem as if all the noise of the street must perpetually beat about the ears of the unhappy residents. There are some with a chapel and a chaplain and some with a chapel but no chaplain. There is a school attached to some, as at the Milburn Hospice in the Stamford Hill Road; there is a garden with some, as at Trinity Hospital, Greenwich; and a fair court with others, as at Emmanuel, Westminster. In some the almsfolk look cheerful and happy, their anxieties being ended; in others they are gloomy and grumpy, as if all their troubles were to come; in some the people are always walking about, talking with their friends, chirruping with each other, and basking in the sun; while in others there is never anybody to be seen, and the old people are all hiding in their beds. In a song

of Almshouses, all these things and many more could be explained.

On a certain Saturday afternoon last July, a day when the sun was hot, the sky clear, and the breeze cool; when all the old men of all the almshouses between Shoreditch on the South and Tottenham on the North were out in the sun, and all the old ladies were out in the shade—for behold! this is the way of the world: the old men seek the sun because it is the source of heat, which is strength, and women seek the shade, where they can watch the sunshine and admire heat and strength—there sat in the chapel at Lilly's, which was open, one of the almswomen. She occupied the square pew, where there are cushions. She was not old, being no more than sixty or so, which is young for a colleger at Lilly's, but she looked old because her hair was so very white and she sat so very still. Her eyes were closed, so that you might have thought her asleep. But she was not asleep—she was blind.

Close beside her, on one of the benches of the four long pews, her feet up, her back against the wall, sat a young girl of fifteen or so, read-

ing a story book. She was a pretty girl, with delicate features of the London type, very capable of a quick repartee and not unaccustomed to a rough joke. The two sat in perfect silence because the old lady had been taking her afternoon nap and still felt restful, and the girl was absorbed in the book.

Lilly's is a venerable but not a splendid foundation. The name of its founder, Josiah Lilly, citizen and pewterer, is commemorated on a stone tablet let into the pediment above the great door in the middle. It consists of a single row of cottages in dull red brick, each containing two rooms, one above and one below, with a kitchen or washhouse behind. In most of the windows, which are old-fashioned, with diamond panes set in lead, there is a geranium, and in some there is a neat white blind half down, as the respectable classes of London love to have it. If any that runs will lift his eyes to read, he may observe, all round London, wherever the neat little cottage prevails, that the blinds are always half down. It is the first assertion of respectability, the first step towards gentility. The negro, with a skin like a crocodile for hardness, buys him a mosquito

curtain when he intends to soar; the London housewife, when she first develops ambitions, hangs out the blind half mast down, as a kind of flag, and why one knoweth not. Nobody is more respectable than an old almswoman, so that the white blind thus adjusted is not uncommon. In front of the cottages is a narrow stone pavement, which makes a convenient walk on fine mornings, and there is a good-sized oblong patch of ground laid out as a vegetable garden, with potatoes and cabbages. It is separated from the road by a low brick wall having a wicket-gate in the middle. There are five cottages on either side of a great door under the pediment, which opens into quite the smallest chapel in this realm of England. It has a window with a semicircular head, a door nearly of its own width, a reading desk and railed communion table, a square pew painted white with cushions and hassocks, and four long pews, also painted white and without cushions, and all of the kind which exasperates ecclesiastics, who would, if they could, take them away and substitute open benches, and so destroy the character of the little chapel. Nobody, outside Lilly's, knows whether there is a chaplain on

the Foundation, or if service is ever held in it, or if it is only maintained as a place of meditation and repose.

The old blind woman was Mrs. Monument. How she got into the almhouses is not known, but Lady Mildred may be suspected of a helping hand. As a general rule it is almost as hard for a poor woman to get into an almshouse as for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven. Not for want of qualified persons, for of such there is never any lack, but by reason of the pushing, fighting, and shoving over every vacancy. However she was in, and had been in for thirteen years, enjoying a time of perfect rest and quiet, though she was only separated from the noisy world by a low brick wall, and from absolute indigence by her cottage, her ten shillings a week, and such additions as were made by Lady Mildred, as, for instance, the attendance of her granddaughter, the girl who sat reading in the long pew, and found waiting on her grandmother a much easier way of life than any enjoyed by her friends. It was indeed a time of great peace which had come to this poor woman; of physical repose; of content and restfulness,

which had settled upon her heart like the sunshine which poured this afternoon into the open door of the little temple, broadening as the sun sloped westward. She wanted nothing; her boys had turned out steady, and her daughters were respectable. To thank the Lord for the respectability of one's daughters seldom occurs to the class where this quality is assumed; but there are other circles where it is hoped for but not always found. She sat in the chapel because it was cool there, and, though only a few feet from the door where the hurrying footsteps and the roll of vehicles and the jingling of the tram, there clung about the place, as about every place of worship, however small and mean, a sense of peace and safety, like the Glory of the Lord about His House.

I know not how long she had been sitting there, but most likely since her dinner—an event which at Lilly's is of much less importance than it is at the Mansion House. That function was usually celebrated at one o'clock, and now it was four. She had taken her nap and was quite awake, as one could tell by the movement of her fingers. The blind sit long and patiently; they are not great talkers, but

they think continually. Conceited persons who read many books secretly believe that nobody can think who does not read. As if the book of experience ever passed through the printing press! As if every old woman has not got enough out of her own life to occupy her thoughts for another hundred and fifty years! Why! this old woman had been young and therefore comely; she had been a bride and a mother; she had known grievous trouble, with the helpless shame of a bad husband; she had worked single-handed to support her children; they were grown up now and doing well; she had no anxiety about them or about her own daily bread; she was growing old but without pain; her world was in darkness; her life was ended save for the things which might happen to the children and for whatever pains and bodily disease might presently fall upon herself. To feel and to understand that nothing remains in life; that everything has been enjoyed or endured; that the work is all done; that there will be no more wages, no more promotion, no more hopes, no more rewards, no more failures; that there remains only the short downward slope which may be perhaps taken with a run

and a leap—this alone must be a very serious and awful thing, though it is the common lot, and therefore, one fain would think, cannot be bad for man. Yet one would pray for a little breathing time, a short space between work and the End, in which, the tools laid down, one may fold the hands, recover and gather together scattered and long-forgotten thoughts, and meditate upon things beyond. Therefore I have always regarded with peculiar envy and admiration those to whom it is granted to spend their latter years in an almshouse. One cannot, I am sure, meditate profitably in the crowd of a workhouse.

Except that Mrs. Monument's once brown hair was now white, and her once white hands were now brown, she was unchanged since she left off her work. Her face was ruddy still—a clean, honest face with the history of the past written in deep lines and puckered crow's feet. She wore a gown of brown stuff, with a white cap and a white apron. And she sat quite composed and still, wrapped in her meditations or her memories. The girl with her feet up in the long pew was as still as herself, and if one was so accustomed to the road as not to hear its

noise, the chapel was as silent as a West Indian Forest. There was a foolish bee who came buzzing about the chapel in search of flowers, and finding none, got angry, and so forgot how he came in. Presently he saw the sunshine pouring in through the open door and flew out, and the place was quiet again. Next Mrs. Monument perceived that two of her fellow lodgers were walking along the flags in front of the cottages—she knew the footsteps and concluded that certain rheumatic pains were better; and then she heard something which caused her to start and sit upright, and brought a glow to her cheek and brightness to her lips.

'Rhoder!' she cried, 'that's my boy's step. It's your uncle Claude. Get up, girl, and bring him here.'

Then she waited in joyful expectation. There were other footsteps, whose she knew not. But she rose and left the pew and stood in the doorway.

'Mother,' said Claude, kissing her.

'My son,' she replied, lightly passing her hand over his face, 'I did not expect you to-day. Who is with you? I heard girls' steps. Are you keeping company at last, Claude?'

'They are—two young ladies, mother, come to see you.'

'Two young ladies! Well, ask them to the house. Rhoda, you go before and put out the chairs.'

Claude led his mother to her cottage at the end of the row. There were three chairs in the sitting-room. The old lady took one—the arm-chair by the fire-place—and the two girls the others. Rhoda stood beside her grandmother gazing curiously at the visitors.

'Mother,' said Claude, 'you remember your little Polly?'

'Remember my dear Polly? Why, Claude, as if I could forget her!'

'We have not talked much about her lately, have we?'

'Have you seen her, Claude?' She caught his arm. 'Oh! have you seen her? Lady Mildred told me you were not to see her till the time came. Tell me—what is she like?'

'I have seen her, mother. She is grown a tall and beautiful girl. She has the manners and the education of a lady. You will never regret that you gave her up.'

'It was to save her from a terrible danger, my dear. I said to myself, "Surely if one of these can be spared, I ought to spare her." So I let her go.'

'And this danger—is it over?' Claude thought she meant possible loss of work, poverty, out-door relief, or the Union, which he remembered as among the bogies of his childhood.

'You are all grown up now. If what I feared were to happen—but it never can—it would not be quite so bad for you now. Sam is a great man, and you're doing something for yourself, and Melenda's in steady work—oh! yes, you could not be tempted.'

'Since the danger is over, then, mother,'—Claude took her hand again—'would you like to see your Polly again?'

She clutched his hand. 'Claude,' she said, 'you have brought her. But I promised Lady Mildred——'

'Lady Mildred sends her.'

'Oh!' She started up and cried aloud, holding out her arms, 'My child, come to your mother. Quick! quick!'

Both the girls sprang to their feet. Claude motioned them to wait.

'Yes, mother,' he said. 'Patience—patience for a moment. You do not know that Polly has been brought up with Lady Mildred's own daughter Beatrice. They are not known apart. No one, but Lady Mildred herself, knows which is Miss Eldridge and which is Polly. It is her intention that no one shall know yet. I have brought them both to you. They are called Valentine and Violet, but which of the two is your daughter I cannot tell you.'

She understood not one word of what Claude was saying, but stood with her outstretched arms feeling in the dark for her child. 'Give me my Polly,' she cried hoarsely.

Claude led Valentine to her. 'Mother,' he said, 'this is Valentine.'

The blind woman passed her hand quickly over Valentine's face, throat, and figure. Then she threw her arms about her and kissed her a hundred times, crying and weeping over her. 'Oh! my dear, my dear,' she said, 'your face is like Claude's. I knew you would take after him and Joe. Tell me your name. Let me hear your voice.'

'I am Valentine,' said the girl.

'Claude's face, but not his voice. Yet I know the voice. As for Valentine—Valentine—what do I know about Valentine? Kiss your mother, Polly. Your real name, my dear, is Marla, but oh! I have never thought of you as anything but Polly. Oh! what a tall girl you've grown! Claude's face and Claude's head, and oh! Polly—Polly-which-is-Marla'—she hugged and kissed her again—'to think that for all these years I never had you once in my arms! Oh! my dear, I've been thirsting for you.'

'But mother,' said Claude, 'do not be too sure. You have not seen Violet yet. Violet is perhaps——'

'Violet? Oh! I suppose she is my lady's own daughter, the beautiful Miss Eldridge, that my Polly was so like.'

'Mother, you must see the other as well.' Claude laid her hands upon Violet's shoulder.

'I am Violet,' said the girl. But while Valentine frankly met the hungry mother's embrace, and gave back kiss for kiss, Violet stood shrinking and trembling with pale face.

The blind woman started. Then she laid

her hands upon the girl's face as she had done to Valentine, but slowly and critically.

'It is Claude's face too,' she said. 'But whose voice was that? Speak again, you other, that I took for my girl.'

'I am Valentine,' said the other.

'What is it, Claude?' asked the poor bewildered woman. 'They both have your face, and one of their voices, though they are different, reminds me of your father's, whom they never saw. Tell me what it means. Oh! what does it mean? Which is my Polly?'

'It means, mother, what I told you—one of these young ladies is Miss Eldridge and one is Polly. But I do not know which.'

'Will you not kiss me too?' asked Violet.

The old woman kissed her, but with the coldness induced by doubt. 'I don't know,' she said, 'I cannot tell which of you is my Polly. And as for Miss Beatrice——'

'Oh,' said Valentine, 'never mind Beatrice. Only tell us what we can do for you, and if you are happy.'

Mrs. Monument sat down before she made reply. They became aware that she was stiffening. The light of love went out of her face;

she remembered that one of the two was Lady Mildred's daughter; what if she had poured those first kisses upon Miss Beatrice? And how could she sustain enthusiasm for half a daughter? She was chilled and bewildered.

Presently, however, she answered in measured terms. She thanked Miss Beatrice for coming to see her, which she took very kindly, and begged to send her duty to her ladyship. As for herself, she was as happy as a woman in her position has a right to expect. Like many country-bred women, Mrs. Monument held the opinion that poor people have no right to expect happiness except in small bits and irregular rations. Many people in their hearts believe that this remarkable doctrine, with the duties of contentment, resignation to injustice, satisfaction with things as they are, and unquestioning respect for everyone who wears a black coat, is laid down in the Bible and Prayer Book. Mrs. Monument went on to say that during the last winter, which had been mild, and the spring, which was short though severe, she had escaped rheumatism to a surprising extent, though there were days when her hands felt like dropping; that she was daily and

faithfully attended by her grandaughter Rhoda; that she was pleased to find her boy Claude still kept on by her ladyship—she imagined that he was a kind of page or assistant butler in the establishment, though for some mysterious reason permitted to prolong his schooling indefinitely—and at this remark Claude looked at the girls and smiled without showing the least confusion. She concluded by saying that when the time came for her Polly to know herself, she hoped the knowledge would lead her to a lowly and grateful spirit, such as became one in her station; and here both girls blushed, because they understood for the first time that the child of the lowly and the humble, however she be brought up, is born to a 'station.'

'My dear mother,' said Claude, 'we are all grateful. Polly will be as grateful as you can desire when she learns the truth. Meantime we are all of us filled with a proper spirit of lowly humbleness. Valentine and Violet are both as meek as nuns; I am grateful; you are grateful; and as for Beatrice, if she is not grateful too, she ought to be ashamed of herself.'

'She ought,' said the girls together.

'Fie, Claude! to speak of Lady Mildred's daughter in such a manner. And she a lady!'

The girls felt hot and ashamed. Was Claude to speak of Beatrice as a stable-boy speaks of his mistress? But Claude only smiled again.

'And she a lady!' he echoed, gravely; 'I had forgotten that.'

'Claude, my dear,' his mother went on, 'if you are in good work, thank Lady Mildred for her help. But don't speak of Miss Beatrice—who is, I suppose, one of those two—those two young persons—as if she was a girl of the same rank as yourself.'

'I will not, mother,' said Claude, seriously.

'As for Polly——'

'Yes, dear.' It was Valentine who spoke, because Violet shrank back as if she were about to receive a blow. 'Yes—mother—when the time comes I hope that I shall know how to conduct myself properly and as becomes my station.'

They all looked at each other. The situation seemed rather strained. 'And so you worked for twenty years,' said Valentine, taking the good woman's hand, 'for twenty years to support your children.'

'Of course I did, Miss—is it Miss Beatrice or is it Polly? Why shouldn't I? There's no hardship and no shame in having to work if you can get work to do and wages for your work.'

'It is time for your tea, mother,' said Claude. The kettle was singing on the hob, for there was a fire, although it was the hottest month in the year, and the tea-things were laid. Then, while the two girls looked on in silence, Claude made the tea and cut the bread and butter, and Rhoda poured it out, and they broke bread together.

But the girls were silent and the old lady stiff and starched.

'Come, mother,' said Claude, 'one of the girls is Polly, you know.'

'One of the young ladies is Miss Beatrice, Claude,' said his mother, 'and very good it is of her, and like my lady, her mother, to come and see her mother's old servant. I only wish I could see her pretty face.'

Neither of the girls answered.

'Why, they both have pretty faces, mother; and as for Beatrice, she is so like Polly that you would never tell the difference. And as for Polly, she is so like Beatrice that you

would never guess that she wasn't a lady born.'

'It's play-actin', Claude,' said the old woman, severely. 'If I can't have my own gal to myself, it's worse than nothing. What is it to me to be told that she's dressed like her mistress and quite the lady? How can she be a lady when her mother was once an under-nurse, and then stood over the washtub on Hackney Marsh, and her father was a working-man? Don't tell me, Claude. As for her not knowing and you not knowing, that's nonsense. You might as well tell me that you've grown up a gentleman.'

'I did not go so far as to say that, mother,' said the Fellow of Trinity.

'No; you've got too much sense, my son. And as for Polly, if she'll quit play-actin' and behave reasonable, I shall be glad to see her any time that her mistress will spare her for an afternoon.'

'Oh! Val,' said Violet.

'My dear,' said Valentine, kissing the poor old lady's forehead, 'we do not know. Indeed we do not know—no one knows except Lady Mildred. We will both come if you will let

us, but we cannot come separately because we do not know.'

She shook her head. 'I do not know which of you it is, the first or the second, but you've got between you your father's voice if it's Polly, and yet it's her ladyship's voice if it's Miss Beatrice. And I can't tell which is which, for the voices have got mixed.'

Then another figure appeared in the doorway. It was a working-man—there could be no mistake about that fact. He carried a bag of tools in one hand; on his arm he slung his jacket because it was hot, and he preferred to work in his shirt-sleeves; and he really had that loose red handkerchief which the girls expected to find about their brother's neck. There was also a pipe in his mouth. Quite the working-man. And perhaps in order to make it perfectly clear that he was not play-acting, whatever his sisters might be, his hands were grimed with dirt and oil. He looked in, saw the assembled company, and was astonished. Then he took his pipe out of his mouth, being a working-man of some politeness.

'Well, mother,' he said. Then he kissed his daughter. 'Well, Rhoder, my girl.' Then

he greeted Claude with a handshake. 'Admiral, how are you?'

'This is Joe,' Claude explained by way of introduction. 'Joe lives in Tottenham a little up the road. On Saturdays and Sundays he never fails to come here.'

'Joe's a good boy,' said the old lady; 'he was always a good boy to me—a good son and a good father of nine.'

Joe sat on the table, which was the only place left to sit upon, and received these praises unabashed. The girls observed that he was a man of handsome features, and that if his chin was shaven, as it doubtless would be on the Sunday morning, his hair trimmed, his face washed, and his neck put into a white collar, he would be curiously like Claude, only twelve years older, or perhaps more, for sixteen years of married life with nine children ages a man, and he might have passed for five-and-forty. As for his occupation, he was the right-hand man of an eminent house-painter, decorator, and plumber of Tottenham—one of those useful citizens who lay our pipes for us, and lay them wrong; who adjust our taps and clean our cisterns, work mischief with our kitchen

ranges, and never leave a house when they are permitted to enter it until there is not a screw or a sink or a tap or a pipe that is not tinkered and ruined. Theirs is a trade so lucrative that it is rapidly rising to the dignity of a profession, and before long it will probably rival the Bar in attracting the brightest and keenest of the English intellect and the flower of the Universities. Joe might not be clever after the cleverness of his father, but he understood his business, and knew how to make money for his employer if not for himself. And steady with it too, except now and again on Saturday evenings. But we have all of us some weakness, failing, or defect, a moral squint or a halting leg.

'Joe,' said Claude, 'I have brought your sister Polly—you remember little Polly—to see her mother.'

'Oh!' said Joe, unmoved; 'you have brought her, have you,?'

'It is a long time since you saw her—nineteen years—and she has grown up and is a young lady now.'

'So it seems,' said Joe; 'who'd ha' thought

it?' But he seemed to take little interest in the subject.

'She has been brought up entirely with Miss Eldridge, and we do not know them apart. Polly is one of these young ladies, but we do not know which.'

Joe looked from one to the other. Then he smiled. Then he passed his hand over his mouth, and the smile went into his eyes, which twinkled.

'Oh!' he said, 'you don't know which of these two young ladies is Polly and which is the other. Oh! ah! And don't no one know?'

'No one but Lady Mildred.'

'Oh!' Here Joe chuckled but choked. 'No one don't know. That's a rum thing, ain't it, Claude?' Claude was looking at his brother, but he was thinking of the two girls and the strange awkwardness of the situation. 'Rhoder, my gal, come here. Stand between them two young ladies for a minute. So! That'll do.' He chuckled again and choked again. 'No one don't know. That's a rum thing, ain't it? Well, if no one don't know, I don't know, do I?'

'Have you no welcome for your sister, Joe?' asked Claude.

'Tell me which she is and I'll give her a kiss'—Violet shuddered—'but I can't kiss 'em both, can I? Even Sam wouldn't have a workin'-man go so far as that, let alone the missus, when she come to hear of it. No, Claude, if one of 'em's my sister, she's dressed altogether too fine for me and my Rhoder and the kids. Not but what they're a pair of beauties. We workin'-men can't afford to have sisters in satin like ladies. As for the Colonel here'—he laid a friendly hand upon Claude's shoulder—'he's a toff, but we're used to him. I don't quite know how he makes his money, but he says it's honestly come by——'

'Oh!' said Violet, 'this is shameful. Claude's money is nobly earned.' She could endure a good deal on her own account, but was Claude to be insulted?

'Joe is quite right,' said Claude.

'When workin'-men's sisters go dressed in kid gloves and silk ribbons, it's natural for people to ask how they came by the money, and not always easy to answer. So, you see, I

can't say as I am pleased to see Polly. As for Claude's work——'

'Claude's work,' said Violet, interrupting, 'is of a kind which you cannot be expected even to understand.'

'Go on,' he replied, grinning; 'I like a girl with a cheek.' He got up and replaced the pipe in his mouth, but it had gone out. 'Good-bye, mother. I'll be round in the morning.' He nodded to Claude. 'Good-bye, Brigadier. As for you two young ladies——' He looked from one to the other, and then he turned to his daughter Rhoda. Again he smiled, and the smile broadened and his eyes began to dance—if the eyes of a working-man at six-and-thirty can be said to dance—and he laughed aloud. 'Ho! ho!' he said; 'and no one knows!' He swung out of the little room laughing still. He laughed across the court, and they heard him laughing as he went up the road. Now for a man to go along the Queen's Highway laughing as he goes by himself is a strange and rather a gruesome thing.

'What is he laughing for?' asked Violet.

'Laughter,' said Claude, 'is produced in many ways, but especially by the unexpected.

The situation is new to him, and therefore, I suppose, ludicrous.'

'Joe's been a good son always,' said his mother, 'though not clever like Sam. Oh! Claude, if you'd only followed in Sam's footsteps. You might have been a Board School master by now, like him.'

'It can't be helped, mother. But it seems a pity, doesn't it? We had better go now, I think, and I'll bring Polly to see you again as soon as we are quite sure which is Polly; and then you won't be afraid of mistaking Miss Eldridge for her, will you?'

It was trying to them all except to Rhoda, when the old lady rose and folded her hands across her apron, and said slowly, because she was saying the things which are right to say, and good manners must not be hurried: 'I wish you humbly good-bye, Miss Beatrice, and I send my humble respects to her ladyship. I hope my Polly will continue to give satisfaction, and I shall be glad to see her when you leave off play-actin', as of course it's your fun and you will have it. She can come in the afternoon and get back by nine. Or Rhoder'll go home, and he can sleep here if her ladyship can spare her.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAW OF ELEVENPENCE HA'PENNY.

THE girls came away from Lilly's almshouses a good deal cast down. They had only succeeded in causing pain to the old lady and bringing shame upon themselves. Therefore they hung their heads.

'After our mother,' said Valentine presently, recovering a little, 'it is our duty to call upon our sister. Can we go to-day?'

'I think you had better not,' said Claude. 'For my own part a visit to Melenda never fails to make me profoundly wretched. I think you had better reserve that visit till another day.'

'Does she live near here, Claude?'

'She lives about two miles down the road at a place called Hoxton. We will go on Monday. Courage!'

'We have plenty of courage,' said Violet,

deceiving herself more than her brother. 'But somehow I am afraid we have not quite grasped the situation. Do you think my sister—Melenda—will receive us with a welcome?'

'No, I should think not,' Claude replied with decision. 'To the best of my knowledge Melenda is always in a rage. You know that she is horribly, shamefully poor.'

'I think, Claude,' said Valentine, 'that we had better take your advice and go on Monday.'

It was in a tenement house, and in Ivy Lane, Hoxton, that Melenda worked all day and slept at night. All the houses in Ivy Lane, or nearly all — because one is a public-house and one or two are shops — are tenement houses. They are mean and squalid houses. The doors and door-posts are black for want of scrubbing; the oldest inhabitant cannot remember when they were painted last; the windows are like the windows in Chancery Lane for griminess; in most of the houses the banisters and some of the steps of the narrow stairs have been broken away for firewood; the plaster of the

ceiling has long since cracked and fallen; the street is slovenly and uncared for. But girls who can afford no more than five shillings a week for a roof and four walls sometimes have to fare worse than in Ivy Lane. They might, for instance, live in one of the courts which run out of Ivy Lane.

Melenda's room was the first-floor front. It was furnished with a broad wooden bed, one of those which are built for three at least, and have often to hold six; two wooden chairs and a round table; there was also a chest of drawers, and there was an open cupboard, the lower part of which formed a box for coals. On the hob stood the kettle, in the cupboard were a few plates and cups, and in one corner reposed a fryingpan and a saucepan.

Two grey ulsters and two hats were hanging on nails driven into the door. This was all the furniture, and it would seem difficult to furnish a room for three girls with more simplicity.

There were three occupants of the room, all young, and all at work. One of them sat on the bed, the other two had the chairs beside

the table. The girl on the bed was a thin delicate-looking creature, about twenty-three or twenty-four years of age; she stooped in the shoulders and had a narrow chest; her face was pale and worn, with lines about the mouth; her eyes were lustrous, and looked larger than they were in reality because her cheeks were so thin. They had the patient expression which comes to those who suffer continually. Her brown hair was thin, and was brushed simply back over her temples, and gathered into a knot; she was dressed in an old, a very old, grey stuff frock, and her shoes were long since worn into holes everywhere, sole and heel and toes. But that mattered little, because she never left the house. She sat on the bed because there was something wrong with her backbone—a twist of some kind—so that she was neither so strong nor so tall as other girls, and had to lie down and take rest whenever she 'felt her back,' which sometimes happened all day and all night long.

This was Lotty. She lived here, though she ought to have been kept warm, well fed, and in idleness in some asylum, or home, or hospital, partly because she knew of no such

home; partly out of the deep friendship and affection which she entertained for Melenda; and partly because Melenda would never have suffered her to go so long as she could, by working day and night, provide for her.

As for Melenda, Claude's sister, she sat at the table. She was now a girl of three-and-twenty; she still preserved the red locks of her childhood. Red hair has its artistic value, and I dare say Melenda's would have looked picturesque had it been respectfully treated. But what can you expect of flaming-red hair if you treat it in London girl fashion—that is, if you cut the front part of it short, and comb a great hunch over the forehead, making a red pillow, and then roll the rest of it up in a knot behind? Such a mode might be taken as a text for the preacher and an illustration of the tyranny of fashion, which does nothing for its votaries except to make them ridiculous, and to destroy any points of beauty that they may possess. The airy, fairy, curly, dainty, delicate arrangement over some young ladies' brows no doubt suggested to the London girl the hunch of hair; but the 'fringe' was never intended to darken and to disfigure the face; nor was the

fringe meant to be a pillow of hair ; nor was it meant for thick red hair with no more curl in it than there is in a cow's tail. If Melenda had been better advised she would have brushed her hair back and disclosed to view a broad, square, and very white forehead which everyone would have respected. And then her eyes, which were as sharp and keen as a pair of electric lights, would have been set in a lighter frame. She was not pretty at all, though, like most red-haired girls, her complexion was good ; her face was square ; her nose was short and straight ; her lips were firmly set ; her chin strong. In stature she was shorter than the average ; her shoulders were broad and her hands large ; she looked a strong girl. But she was thin : her cheeks were hollow, and her figure wanted the filling out which comes of food and enough of it. Polly's sister looked always hungry : she also looked capable, strong-willed, and resolute, and she looked as if she could exhibit temper if she chose : lastly, she ooked as if she often chose.

The third girl, Lizzie, was of a type which is not unusual in London and almost peculiar to the great city. It has many variations and

breaks out into eccentricities of all kinds, but, speaking generally, Lizzie belonged to that class of London girls who are all eyes. They have, it is true, other features as well, but their eyes strike one first and most, because they are so large, so round, so deep, so full of all imaginable and possible thoughts, intentions, and desires. Their mouths are also noticeable, because they are small, rosebud mouths, generally with parted lips, as if the soul of the maiden within were waiting to receive the sweet and holy gifts and graces for which her eyes show her yearning. It is impossible to see such a girl without longing immediately to take her away and place her where she may be in perpetual commune with things lofty and spiritual. Lizzie had her fringe too, but her hair was brown, not red: it was curly and not straight; and as she had some glimmering of taste, and did not drag a great solid lump of hair over her forehead, but had a few short curls in its place, the effect was not unpleasing. In figure she was tall but slight, and she was too thin, though she did not look quite so hungry as Melenda. Her head was small and her features possessed a good deal of delicacy.

Men, who are more catholic in such matters than ladies, and can discern beauty even where the elbows stick out visibly through the sleeves, would say that here were the elements or makings of a really beautiful girl, if only she could get a fair show.

By one o'clock in the day they had already worked for six hours, because they began at seven. Six hours of almost continuous sewing seems a good day's work; one would not care to sit even over the most delicate embroidery for more than six hours a day: and this was not delicate work at all, but coarse work on coarse and heavy stuff—the stuff of which the commonest shirts are made—those intended to rasp the skin of the unfortunate native, who would so much prefer to sit in buff, brown or black, and suffer the sun to gently bake him all over. Six hours of steady sewing: no student can read with effect for more than six hours a day: no man can write for more than six hours if he care to write well: few men can dig for more or can carry burdens for more without a good spell of rest. These girls, however, were so strong and so industrious that they were going to work for seven hours

longer, that is till daylight should cease; if it had been winter they would have worked long after daylight ceased. This is a really good day's work—if you think of it—from seven in the morning till nearly nine at night; this is to work with a will: to work heartily: to expend oneself without stint: to acquiesce in the curse of Adam. It is a day's work which no one but a railway director or an omnibus company dares to exact of men; if a factory were to require such a day there would be a strike, with letters to the papers, even if the men's wages were a shilling an hour. A truly wonderful day's work, only to be understood when one realises the constant presence, felt but not seen, of a Fury with serpents in her hair and an uplifted lash of scorpions in her hands, sometimes called Necessity and sometimes known as Hunger.

The girls generally worked in silence, but to-day there had been a little outbreak on the part of Lizzie, with revolutionary sentiments. She was promptly suppressed by Melenda, who followed up her victory with a few remarks which clinched the submission but left sulkiness and a smouldering fire of rebellion.

When the clock struck one—somebody's clock in some neighbouring street—Melenda looked up and broke the silence.

'Lotty,' she said imperiously, 'lie down this minute.'

Lotty obeyed without a word. She had been sitting up too long, and now she lay back with closed eyes, and her short breathing showed that she was suffering.

The other girl tossed her work impatiently on the table.

'One o'clock,' she said. 'It ought to be dinner-time soon. What have we got for dinner?' She laughed derisively. 'And what shall we have to-morrow? And the next day —and the day after?'

'Don't, Liz,' said Melenda softly. 'Don't, just now. It makes her back worse. Let her go to sleep.'

'I'm not asleep,' said Lotty, opening her eyes. 'Don't mind me, Liz.' She stretched out her hand and caught Lizzie by the wrist. 'Patience, my dear.'

'Patience! oh!'

'It's only since the concert that it's come

on,' said Melenda, looking at her companion as a physician looks upon a patient.

'Why shouldn't it be since the concert, then?' asked Lizzie.

'What have gentlemen got to do interfering with work-girls?' asked Melenda in reply.

Lizzie laughed defiantly.

'Why shouldn't he speak to me? Speaking's no harm. Why shouldn't he tell me the truth? That's no harm. Nobody else tells the truth. The clergyman don't, he says, for fear we shouldn't work any longer; and the district visitors don't, for fear we should strike. And the work is crool, he says, and the wages dreadful; and so they are.'

'I've told you that already,' said Melenda. 'Sam says so too.'

'And there's many better ways of living. Some girls go to theatres if they're pretty enough. And some go and get painted in pictures. He says I'm pretty enough for that, and he knows gentlemen who'd like to paint my eyes.'

'Liz, he's deceiving you,' said Melenda. 'Paint your eyes, indeed! He takes you for a fool.'

'And he says that it's no good stopping here. He says it's a God-forgotten life. He says we shall never get better money and never any easier work. Think of that, Lotty. We shall get old and die, he says, and never any pretty things to put on and always not enough to eat, and——' Here she stopped, being out of breath.

'It can't be always,' said Lotty, 'because there must be an end some day.'

'Oh! That end!' Lizzie laughed scornfully, because the undertaker and the natural end of man's or woman's life seems so far away to a young girl of seventeen.

'It won't be always,' said Melenda, 'because Sam says we are going to have no more rich people very soon. We shall divide everything, and after that we shall always have enough, because the people will keep their own when they have got it, and there will be no more masters.'

'You're a silly, Melenda,' said Lizzie, 'to believe such nonsense. Besides, if it were true, what would the girls get? The men would only keep it all to themselves and spend it at the public-houses.'

'Did the gentleman tell you that too?'

'Never mind what else he told me.'

'Liz,' said Lotty, 'you haven't seen him again, have you? Oh! promise you won't talk to him any more. Oh! this is what comes of giving Concerts for the People. Liz! Liz!'

But Lizzie tossed her head, snatched her hat, and ran away, and Lottie sighed and lay back again.

'Who was the gentleman, Melenda?' she asked. 'Don't let her go on talking to gentlemen. Has she seen him again? Do you know his name?'

'I do not know. We went to the concert. There was a young lady in a black silk frock, and she sang; and there was another in a pink frock, and she sang; and there was some one else who recited; and one man playing on the piano, and another on the violin. I've told you all that before. When we came away I missed Liz in the crowd, and when she came home she was all trembling like, and cried when you were asleep, and wished she was dead and buried, and told me she'd been for a walk with a gentleman, who'd been talking to her about

her work and her wages, and made her discontented.'

Lottie sighed, but made no reply.

'If we could strike like the men,' said Melenda. 'It's the only thing, Sam says. Why, if we could strike, the fine ladies wouldn't get their things so cheap; and they know it, and that's why they go about giving concerts to us and pretending to be our friends, just to keep us from throwing the work in their faces and striking. Sam says so.'

'Oh, Melenda! But the ladies don't know. If they knew——'

'They do know.' Melenda stamped her foot. She was in one of her rages. 'They've been told a thousand times. And they don't care—they don't care—so long as they buy their things cheap. Well, we've got our freedom, Lotty; and we ain't obliged to go to their concerts, are we? And if a gentleman speaks to me, I'll let him know.'

Lotty made no reply, but closed her eyes again. She had, in fact, nothing to say that could help or even console. She had never considered the subject of supply and demand, or else no doubt she might have administered

solace out of those golden rules which keep wages low, hours long, and work scarce. In the old days Lotty knew a great quantity of texts which she might have found comforting, but she had now forgotten them all. Besides, no amount of texts would have brought consolation to Melenda's bosom, because that young lady was as free and emancipated from the trammels of religion as the most advanced woman in the whole school. It was, in fact, part of her independence not to attend any form of divine service, not from any animosity towards the Christian faith, but simply because all forms of worship make demands upon a girl's freedom.

There was some cold tea standing on the chest of drawers, with a loaf of bread, and some yellow substance flattered by the name of butter. Melenda cut two thick slices and poured out some tea. 'Lucky we had a bit of meat for Sunday,' she said. 'Take your dinner now, Lotty, dear.'

'I am better now,' said Lotty, after their feast. 'If I rest for half an hour I shall be able to work again. Where's Liz gone?'

'You go to sleep,' said Melenda. 'As for

Liz, she'll come in presently, when she's ramped round a bit.'

Lotty obeyed and closed her eyes.

Then Melenda resumed her work. In a few minutes she saw that Lotty was asleep. She might have been dead, so motionless she lay and so waxen-pale were her cheeks. In sleep the closed eyes lost their worn look, and the lines of the forehead were smoothed out, and the face dropped back, so to speak, into the mould in which it was cast. Melenda carefully drew the counterpane—it was old and ragged, alas! and wanted washing—over her friend's arms and chest, and laid her ulster over her feet with tender hand and softened eyes, and then sat down again and began to stitch with a kind of fierceness. It pleased her that she could work twice as fast as the other two, and that while her friend was resting she was doing the share of both.

Meantime, in St. John's Road, close by, there walked together side by side a gentleman and a work-girl.

'You will think of it, won't you?' he asked. 'It is a cruel thing for a pretty girl like you to be slaving so hard. Pretty girls were not

meant to do hard work, you know. You ought to be beautifully dressed, and standing on the stage, and all the men in the house clapping because you would look so beautiful.'

'I can't never leave Lotty and Melenda,' the girl replied.

'Meet me again this evening. I will be by the church at nine. Will you promise?'

'I don't care,' she said. 'Yes, I will then. But it's no use. I won't never leave Melenda and Lotty.'

There are many openings and a splendid variety of choice for a girl who insists on her independence and, therefore, refuses to go behind counters or bars, or into offices, or some other people's houses. She may become a dressmaker, a milliner, or a seamstress, she may make shirts, cuffs, collars, or button-holes: she may enter any of the various branches of the great Sewing Mystery: she may go into a Factory—there are quantities of Factories to choose from—but whatever she does and wherever she goes she may quite confidently reckon on short pay and long hours: in all probability she will be bullied by the foreman

and snubbed, scolded, and nagged by the forewoman: her independence will be the privilege of sleeping in a room shared with two or three other girls, together with that of keeping any hours she pleases, and she may be certain beforehand that her poverty and her helplessness will be *exploités* to the utmost by her employer as much as if she was an omnibus driver: that her whole life will be spent in bad lodgings, on slender commons, with friends of the poorest and work of the hardest: she may rely upon getting no help from anybody, certainly none from her brothers, who, poor fellows! have to pay for their clubs, their drinks, and their amusements, and cannot do what they would wish for their sisters: none from the political economist to whom an ill-paid work-girl illustrates in a most satisfactory manner the beneficent Law of Supply and Demand, ordained by the Creator in the Day when He created Man and Woman for the advantage of the Middle-man, chosen of his race, and the Development of His next noblest Creation the Manufacturer: none from politicians, because they think that the working-woman will never be

a danger to any party; none—alas!—from ladies, because their injustice is too old and stale, and the Song of the Shirt, which has been sung for forty years, is known by heart, and the sight of the sister, who never cries out or complains, is familiar, and because of that strange hardness of woman's heart towards women, which is a wonderful and a monstrous thing. Nor will the working-girl expect any help from her own class, because they have not learned to combine, and there is none to teach them, and the sharp lessons, including thwacks, kicks, hammerings, rattening, and boycotting, by which the working-men were forced and driven into their unions, are impossible for the girls.

Melenda chose to be a sewing machine. In this capacity she got button-holes to make with her friends. They were three really very industrious girls, and with so much industry, their rent only four shillings, and bread lower than ever it has been known before, and likely to be cheaper still, and tea and sugar always 'down again,' they ought to do very well indeed, and be able to buy themselves pretty frocks, and perhaps save money, and to go

about with rosy cheeks, and they should every morning be ready to greet the rosy sun with a hymn of praise. That they did not do any of these things, that their clothes were ragged, their cheeks pale, their eyelids heavy, their purse empty, was due to the action of a very remarkable Law in Political Economy — a science which most wonderfully illustrates the Divine Goodness and the Beneficence of Creation. This Law has hitherto, I believe, escaped the observation of all the professors. It is the Law of the Lower Limit, which will be better understood by being named after an outward and visible sign, the most obvious and best-known result of its beneficent operation. I have therefore ventured to call it the Law of Elevenpence Ha'penny. It has been found, in fact, by the employers of woman's labour, who are one and all the most humane, the most considerate, and the most unselfish creatures in existence, that there is a limit of wage below which human life cannot be sustained. It is highly to their credit that they seldom try to get below this limit, which is exactly marked by the wage of elevenpence ha'penny a day. Therefore no working-woman,

of those who work at home, is allowed to make more, because this would be a flying in the face of the Eternal Laws. And it would be clearly inhuman to offer less. To be sure the women sometimes get less because they are often out of work: but the employers cannot be blamed for that. The Law of Elevenpence Ha'penny or the Law of the Lower Limit is the only law that humanity is called upon to obey, and the conscience of those who pay the girls at this rate of wages is calm and easy. One positively envies the conscience of the wholesale match-maker, the wholesale jam-maker, the wholesale shirt-maker, the wholesale maker of anything which may be made or sewn by the hands of women and girls. The wickedness of the men who refuse to obey this law (designed at the Creation for them as well as for women) is part of the universal depravity which causes men to think and act for themselves, without any respect for law or authority in religion, politics, morals, manners, and customs.

The law of Elevenpence Ha'penny. As Melenda worked exactly two-and-a-half times faster than Lotty, and Lizzie one-and-a-half times, it follows that to produce an average of

elevenpence ha'penny, Melenda should earn seventeenpence and five-twentieths, and Lizzie tenpence and seven-twentieths, and Lotty sixpence and nine-tenths, and that they did so shows how good a worker Melenda was. Sometimes, however, there was less because work has to be taken back and fetched, and there are delays in getting fresh work. At the best, therefore, these girls between them could earn seventeen shillings and threepence a week. Their rent was four shillings, so that there was left the sum of thirteen shillings and threepence for everything else. That is to say, the splendid sum of sevenpence and four-sevenths apiece, or very nearly sevenpence ha'penny a day, remained for all their wants.

My very dear young lady, you who sit at home in ease, how would you like to find yourself in food, frocks, fire, furniture, music, boots, bonnets, books, trinkets, gloves, and all the thousand-and-one things that go to make a girl's life, on sevenpence ha'penny a day? But these girls are not like you? That, I assure you, is not at all the case. It is a falsehood invented by the Devil when he invented the figment of nobility, gentry, and villain. If you

desire to know what the work-girl really is, go to the looking glass and study very carefully, not your bonnet, which is very becoming, nor your face, which is so pretty that one wishes he was young enough to fall in love with it, nor the dressing of your hair, which might be much more artistic, but the unseen self which lies behind the face. That is the working-girl as well as yourself, my dear young friend.

In half an hour or so Lizzie came back, quiet and subdued, but with a rosy flush on her cheek and brightened eyes.

'I've had dinner,' she answered when Melenda pointed to the tea-pot. 'I've had an egg and a cup of coffee. It was given to me —by—a young girl I know.'

Melenda looked at her sharply, but said nothing.

Then there was silence in the room save for the click of the needle and the thimble and the rustling of the stuff in which they were sewing the button-holes. But Melenda was disturbed and ill at ease, partly on account of Lizzie and the unknown gentleman who made her discontented, and partly because it seemed to her—perhaps the bread and butter had not been

thick enough—as if a man's voice was repeating aloud, over and over again, banging and beating the words into her head, 'All your lives—all your lives;' and then the voice of her brother Sam—it was a deep, rich bass—chimed in saying, 'Why don't you strike? Why don't you strike?' This was not agreeable. But the time passed on, and the distant clock struck two three and four while Lotty still slept on and the other two worked in silence.

It was just after the striking of four that the girls heard footsteps in the narrow passage below, and voices which were not the voices of their fellow lodgers. One of the voices said, 'Will you wait below, Claude? We would rather go up alone.'

And then the door opened, and two young ladies appeared. They were young ladies the like of whom the girls had seldom, if ever, seen, for they were so beautiful and so beautifully dressed, and at sight of their frocks and their hats the soul of Lizzie sank within her. The District Visitor they knew, because she sometimes called and always had a fight with Melenda, but she was not by any means beautifully dressed. Also certain ladies had once or

twice come into their street and gone about the houses curiously, and received sharp replies to their questions. But they were not beautiful.

'Is there a girl here named Melenda?' asked one of them.

Lotty awoke, and sat upright with a start. Lizzie stared and dropped her work and her thimble, which rolled under the drawers, and afterwards half an hour was wasted in looking for it. The owner of the name, suspecting a visit from people in the interests of Church services, only looked up and nodded.

Then the two young ladies stepped forward and seized each a hand, saying softly,

'Oh! Melenda, we are your sister Polly.'

Alas! that Polly should have chosen this day of all days for her return after an absence of nineteen years.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNLUCKY DAY.

CLAUDE waited below in Ivy Lane on the shady side of the street. It was full of children playing noisily, and there were soft and murmurous echoes, poetically speaking, from Hoxton Street on the right, where there is a perpetual market. Presently he became aware of a shrill voice rapidly rising, which he easily recognised as his sister Melenda's voice.

The voice rose so loud that he could catch some of the words. And it seemed to him as if this visit promised to be even a greater failure than that to the Almshouse. At last the voice grew so shrill and the language so unmistakable, that he thought he ought to follow the girls, if only to protect them.

When he opened the door he was greeted by Melenda herself with a derisive laugh.

'Charity boy!' she said, pointing with her forefinger.

He had, however, heard this remark before, and now received it without emotion.

Valentine was standing at the table with flushed face and a look of bewilderment and pain. Violet was cowering in Lizzie's chair—absolutely cowering—and crying. Lotty was looking on, troubled and perplexed. Lizzie sat on the bed beside her, the work in her hands, making believe that the scene neither interested nor concerned her, and that she was wholly occupied and absorbed in her button-holes, which she handled ostentatiously, holding the garment up to the light, spreading it on her knee, contemplating it with the needle in her mouth, and in other ways proclaiming her entire unconsciousness of the Row. Yet she listened and smiled with pride when Melenda surpassed herself, and from time to time she lifted her great eyes and took in some fresh detail of the ladies' dresses. Oh! could she ever have dreamed of things so beautiful?

'Charity boy!' repeated Melenda. 'Of course he brought the charity girl with him.'

Claude made no reply, which disconcerted

her. And he looked at her not angrily but gravely and wonderingly, which made her still more angry.

'What is the matter, Valentine?' he asked, after a pause. 'Has my sister been rude to you?'

'Yes,' Melenda broke in; 'I've been rude to both of 'em. I've told them the truth, and I wish they may like it and get it every day. Rude? Oh! yes, I've been rude. Don't make any error about that, Claude.' She stuck—I use the word deliberately—she stuck her elbows on the table and put on her most defiant face.

'What is the truth, Melenda?' Claude asked her; 'will you tell it to me as well?'

The aggravating thing with Claude was that you could never make him angry by calling him names, not even by calling him a charity boy. To-day, being in a Rage Royal, Melenda began with this supreme insult. She generally ended with it. People ought to get angry when you call them names, else there is no reason in calling names; and then, what a weapon thrown away! Not to get angry in return is unkind towards one's fellow creatures; it betrays want of sympathy; it arrogates a disgusting superi-

ority; it makes people who have yielded to their wrath, and slung all the names they could find, hot and ashamed of themselves. Common people, ordinary, simple, unaffected people, not stuck-up people, get very angry when they are called names, and retaliate by calling worse names immediately by return post, or they take to punching heads or jumping upon one another. Claude, for his own exasperating part, only looked at his sister with his grave eyes as if he was wondering where she was feeling the pain and what ought to be done for it.

'Let us have the whole truth, Melenda.'

'The truth is that we don't want fine ladies here. We're work-girls, and we've got to earn our living, and we ain't ashamed of it. We don't want to be looked at like as if we were elephants in a circus. Let 'em go and look at somebody else. We ain't a show. Lotty ain't a clown; I ain't a jumping-horse; Liz ain't a salamander.'

'Don't you want to see your sister again, Melenda?'

'My sister!' She threw out her arms with a fine gesture, free and unstudied. 'Oh! look at me and look at them. Listen to him—my

sister! Look at my frock, and Lotty's frock, and Lizzie's frock, and look at theirs. My sister! And they can't tell which it is. My sister! If you come to that——'

'But one of these young ladies is your sister—and mine.'

'It's the first I've heard of Polly being a young lady. Which of 'em is it, then? Is it her, who can't be spoken to but she begins to cry? or her'—Melenda suited gesture with her thumb to words, so that no mistake should be possible—'who wants to shake hands and to kiss? A pretty kiss!'

'They only learned a day or two ago that they had a sister. Was it unkind in them to make themselves known to you as quickly as they could?'

'Well, they're curious, and they've had their curiosity. They've seen me, and now they may go away and boast to all the swells that they've got a sister who makes button-holes. Sooner they go the better. Come! they've wasted time enough already.'

'You are very unkind,' said Valentine. 'If we were to come again when you were not so busy with work——'

'No,' said Melenda, 'I don't want to see either of you never again. One of you is Polly, because you say so, and I don't see why you should be proud of being my sister. Well, when Polly leaves off pretending to be a lady she may come here, and not before.'

'Your sister,' said Claude, 'can never lay aside that pretence.'

'Mother hadn't ought to let her go,' the girl went on; 'I always said so. Why should Polly be brought up with nothing to do all her life but to sit down and to eat and drink?'

'On the contrary,' said Claude, 'she has done a great deal.'

'Does she go dressed like this?' asked Melenda, springing to her feet, and displaying with rapid gesture the deficiencies of her scanty wardrobe, the whole of which was upon her. 'Does she get up at six and work all day till nine? Does she have bread and butter and tea for all her meals?'

'Oh!' said Valentine, 'if you will only let us help you. We did not come here to pry upon you—not out of curiosity—oh! not out of curiosity. We came because we wanted to know our sister.'

'Now you know her then, you can go away again. I don't mind. You see what I am. Oh! I know what I'm like, and what Liz is like, and Lotty—only Lotty is different. Fine manners, ours, ain't they? Go away and laugh at us.'

'Indeed there is nothing to laugh at,' said Valentine.

'Then cry over us like her'—she meant Violet. 'I dare say she likes crying. If a girl had said half to me that I've said to her, I'd have had her hair out of her head.'

'You are cruel,' said Violet; 'is it our fault that Polly was taken from you?'

'Didn't say whose fault it was. It's no concern of mine. You've got my thimble, Liz. Where's your own?'

'Melenda, try to be gracious,' said Claude. 'Pretend to know something about manners. Make believe that Sam is here. You generally behave, you know, when Sam is present.'

Melenda sniffed. 'Come,' she said, returning to the charge, 'you were curious to see your sister, weren't you? Well, you've seen her, and I dare say you'll ask her to tea and shrimps and meet your fine friends. I'll come

with Joe and Sam and some of Joe's kids if you like, to make a family party. And now you can go away and be mighty thankful that you weren't left to grow up with your mother and me. Else you'd be sitting here this moment where Liz is sitting, and working like Liz is working.'

She sat down, picked up her work, and began to sew again violently.

Valentine sighed. 'You *shall* see me again,' she said, 'whether you like it or not. You cannot lock the door in your sister's face. I will make you want to see me.'

Melenda went on sewing without any reply.

Then Valentine turned to Lotty.

'Tell me,' she said, 'are you perhaps a cousin of Melenda's and mine?'

'No,' said Lotty, 'I'm only her friend. We've lived together for eight years, Melenda and me.'

'And do you sew every day?'

'Unless we're out of work we do. It is all we have learned.'

'But you don't look strong enough for the work.'

'I'm stronger than I look,' said Lotty,

smiling. 'I can do a good bit of work. It's my back which isn't strong, and makes me cough sometimes. I've got to lie down a great deal. And then Melenda works for me.' She looked up shyly. 'You won't mind what Melenda said, will you, Miss? She's put out to-day about something—something somebody said to Liz about the work, it was. Please don't mind; she's easy put out, but she's the best heart in the world.'

'You'll just have to lie down again, Lotty,' said Melenda, 'if you talk so much.'

'What is your name?' asked Valentine.

'Lotty—Charlotte East. This is Liz. Her father lives downstairs, but she lives and works with us. She's seven years younger than me. I'm twenty-four and Liz is seventeen.'

'Do you like your work, my dear?' Valentine asked Lizzie.

The girl turned her great heavy eyes upwards. 'No, I don't,' she replied slowly.

'If you've got to do it, what's the odds whether you like it or whether you don't?' asked Melenda.

'Come, Valentine,' said Violet, 'it is no use staying.'

'Not a bit,' said Melenda.

'Have you no kind word for us at all, Melenda?' Valentine asked.

'Look here,' the girl replied; 'you don't belong to us, neither of you. Go away to the people you do belong to—you and Claude. They're the people that keep us girls on a shilling a day, so as they can get their dresses cheap. Stick to them. They're the people who've stolen the land and the labour and everything that's made. Sam says so. Leave us alone. Don't come here and laugh at us. I won't have it. And as for you'—she turned to Violet, who shrank back and caught Claude by the arm—'dare to come again and cry at us! If you do, I'll tear your bonnet off.'

'You are behaving very rudely, Melenda,' said Claude.

She sniffed again and tossed her head.

Since, however, she continued in this hard and unrepentant mood, and showed no sign of melting, there was nothing left but to withdraw, which they did, retreating in good order, as the history books say, or rolling sullenly over the border, as they also say. That is, the enemy did not shove them downstairs, nor tear off

their bonnets, nor hurl things after them, nor call them names, but suffered them to retire unmolested. To be sure, they were routed; there was no possibility of mistake about that.

For at least two hours Melenda continued stitching in absolute silence, but her lips moved. At the expiration of this period she broke out into short interjectional phrases, which showed that her mind was powerfully working. 'I'm glad I spoke out—did her good for once—I won't be cried at—we don't want curious ones here—teach them to keep their own places,' and so forth—not original or novel phrases, and perhaps wanting in dignity, but with some fire. Then she relapsed into silence again.

It was nearly nine o'clock when it became too dark to see the work any longer, and they put it by.

Then Lizzie began to make certain preparations. She took a hat out of a drawer—a hat with a feather in it. She tied a bright-coloured ribbon round her neck, and she put on her ulster, which is a work-girl's full dress for summer or for winter, only in summer there is not always a frock under it.

'Liz, dear,' said Lotty, 'you won't be late,

will you? And, Liz—don't—oh! Liz—don't talk with any more gentlemen.'

Lizzie made no reply, and disappeared.

'She's put on her best ribbon,' Lotty said, with a sigh, 'her Sunday ribbon. What's that for, I wonder?'

Melenda made no reply. She was thinking of her own sister, not of Lizzie.

'Oh!' she cried presently, throwing out her arms in a gesture unknown to the stage, but natural and very striking; 'if she'd only come alone! But to come in a pair, and for both to sit and smile and say they didn't know which of them was Polly, as if it didn't matter what became of her—I suppose because she was a poor girl and her mother was a washer-woman, and you and me and Liz beneath their notice, and it was all pride and curiosity and looking down upon us—I couldn't bear it, Lotty, so I spoke up. I'm glad I did.'

She showed her gladness by bursting into tears.

'I'd do it again. If they come again, I'd do it again. With their kid gloves and their real flowers and gold chains, and to look about the room as if we were wild beasts at a show, and

a teapot a thing they'd never seen before. We don't want 'em. Let 'em leave us to ourselves. We can do our work without them, and bear what we've got to bear, Lotty, you and me together, can't we?'

'They looked sorry,' said Lotty, doubtfully; 'they'd got kind faces and they spoke kind.'

'I don't know,' Melenda went on, 'which I hate the most—the one who looked as if the very sight of us made her sick and ashamed—that was the one who began to cry when I up and cheeked her; or the one who wouldn't cry, and on'y stared as if I was something strange, and kep' saying that I was mistaken, and wouldn't get into a rage, say what I liked. Just like Claude—you can't put Claude in a rage. I believe that one must be Polly. All the same I hate her: I hate 'em both.'

'I wouldn't hate them if I were you, Melenda,' said Lotty. 'What's the good? They only came to see if they could help you, p'r'aps.'

'They help me? Likely! I wouldn't have their help, nor Claude's neither, if I was starving. As for Polly being my sister, they took her away and we've lost her.'

'If it was to dress her up and make her a lady, so much the better for her. I wish somebody would take us all three away and do just the same.'

'You've no spirit, Lotty. Of course it's your poor back. But you've no spirit.'

Melenda put on her hat and went downstairs into the streets. She always finished the day in this manner. After fifteen hours of sewing in one room and in one position it is necessary to get change and fresh air. Therefore two of the girls roamed the streets, making of Hoxton Street and Pitfield Street and the City Road and Old Street their boulevard from nine o'clock or so until twelve. The society of the streets is mixed; things are said in them which in other circles are left unsaid; but there is life and a faint semblance of joy, and some kind of laughter and light and fresh air. Melenda passed through the children playing in Ivy Lane, and the groups of mothers standing about and talking together, and turned into Hoxton Street. She avoided for once the crowd on the pavement, and trudged along in the road behind the costers' carts, for it is a street where they hold perpetual

market. When she came to the end of Hoxton Street she walked on till she came to the bridge over the canal. It is a strange place. The water lies below black and rather terrible. Melenda had heard legends of girls throwing themselves into that black water when they were tired of things. There is generally visible a barge with its light and its fire. To-night the girl's brain, as she leaned over the parapet, was full of tumult. Her own sister had come back to her, and she had driven her away with shameful words and insults. To be sure she had long forgotten the very existence of her sister. Perhaps, from time to time, she thought of her as one thinks of an old playmate gone away years ago to Australia or to the Western Lands, never to return. But she had come back—the little Polly—transformed into a young lady, and Melenda had used hard words.

It was nearly midnight when she got home. A few of the children were still in the court, but they were sitting on the doorstep, and some of them asleep: these were the children who were afraid to go upstairs because father was drunk and not yet gone to sleep. A few

women were still talking, but most had gone home and to bed. One or two of the men were singing or roaring or crying, according to their habits when drunk; but not many, because it was Monday night, which is generally a sober time. In the room on the first floor front Liz was in bed and sound asleep. Lotty was lying on her back, watching and waiting.

'Melenda,' she whispered, 'they were beautiful young ladies. They meant to be kind. Don't make them cry if they come again.'

'There oughtn't to have been but one,' said Melenda severely. 'Go to sleep this minute, Lottie. Polly wasn't twins.'

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER MELENDA.

In the evening of the same day Lady Mildred was at home. Claude's acquaintance with society was limited, as may be supposed. He who is climbing must wait until he has reached the higher levels before he can think of society. Such an evening as this, with the musical laughter of girls, the continuous murmur of talk, the brightness of the rooms, the atmosphere of happiness and freedom from care, just as if everything was real, solid, and abiding, and everybody was young and happy, and was going to remain young and happy, filled Claude with a kind of intoxication and delight, and to-night he could admire his sister in one of these two girls with a sense of wonder as if it was a dream. His life had been serious —the life of one who had no chance except to succeed by his own efforts. Society, which has

no serious aims, holds no place for such a man until he has succeeded: women hold no place in such a man's life until he has got up to a certain elevation.'

'What are you thinking of, Claude?' Valentine asked him.

'I was thinking of contrasts and incongruities,' he replied.

'The contrast of the afternoon with the evening. Yes. But if you cannot forget those things, you will begin to think that we are mocking at misery. What would Melenda think and say if she were to stand among us suddenly?'

'One can hardly imagine,' Claude laughed, 'anything more incongruous.'

'I suppose she would ask us how we could possibly feel happy on the very day when we had seen her home and her friends. And I am sure she would not understand how we could sing and laugh and yet not forget her or cease to think of her. Society must have its incongruities—I suppose, because we must hide away so much of ourselves.'

At the other end of the room was Violet in the middle of a group, talking with bright

eyes and apparently the lightest heart in the world.

'Violet had a hysterical fit when we came home this afternoon,' Valentine whispered. 'Melenda was too much for her. Yet she puts on a brave face, and nobody would suspect the truth'

With her—one of her group—was Jack Conyers. As Valentine crossed the room with Claude he glanced quickly from Violet to Valentine and then to Claude.

Strange! The girls were not only like each other, but they both looked like Claude. It was the first opportunity Conyers had obtained since hearing of Claude's relations with Lady Mildred's daughters of making a comparison between the girls and their brother. Surely, with the portrait of Sir Lancelot at five-and-twenty, gazing upon the room from the wall; with Lady Mildred herself, present in the flesh; with the two girls, and with Claude their brother, there should be data enough to solve the problem easily. Jack Conyers, however, like everybody else who attempted a solution of the riddle, forgot one essential thing. It is this: if two girls are

brought up together from childhood in exactly the same way, with the same education, the same food, the same governors, pastors, and masters, and are kept apart from other girls, and are dressed alike, they may grow very much like each other; little points of resemblance may become accentuated. Chinamen, for instance, who are a very gregarious people, present to the outward world millions of faces all exactly alike. Old married people are often observed to have grown like each other; and if you look at a girls' charity school, where they live all together under one roof, and are subjected to exactly the same rules and influences, you will find that they certainly grow to have the same face.

There is, for instance, a certain Reformatory of my aquaintance in a London suburb. The young ladies belonging to this institution are marched in procession to church every Sunday. As they pass along the road, the admiring bystander becomes presently aware that they are all exactly alike. It is bewildering until philosophy lends its light. For the girls are like so many sisters: here a dozen twins; here a triplet or two; here more twins. Some are

older, some are younger; but they are all of one family—they are apparently of one father and one mother. The Reformatory face is striking, but by no means pleasing. It looks, in fact, as if Monsieur le Diable has had more to do with the girls' fathers or mothers, or both, than with other people's fathers and mothers.

No doubt it was due to the nineteen years of close association and friendship that Valentine and Violet had grown so much alike, and Mr. Conyers, had he been wise, would have looked for points of dissimilarity rather than of resemblance. But this he did not think of. Besides, the young ladies were not like the models who came to his studio: they did not sit to him; he could only study their faces furtively.

'They both look like Claude too,' Jack Conyers thought, with troubled brow. 'First one looks like him, and then the other. If only they wouldn't dress their hair exactly alike, there might be a chance.'

Other eyes besides his own were curiously watching and comparing Claude with the two girls, for some of the people knew that the brother of one was present, and there was a natural anxiety to know which he resembled

and what sort of a young man he was. Seeing that he was only the son of a working man, it was rather disappointing to find a young man of good manners and excellent appearance, reported to be a Fellow of Trinity who had distinguished himself, and was now called to the Bar. Except that the face was somewhat like the faces of the girls, cast like theirs in the oval mould, there was nothing at first sight to connect him with one girl more than with the other. So that everybody was disappointed and went empty away.

Presently Valentine sang. She had a strong and full contralto voice, which had been carefully trained and cultivated. And she had, besides, the heart of the musician. But she would not sing more than once.

'Claude,' Violet whispered, when the singing ceased, 'can you sing?'

'Not at all. I have no voice.'

'Nor have I. That is one point of resemblance between us. Is it part of our inheritance? No voice and no fortune. Of course you can paint and draw?'

'No. I can hardly hold a pencil, and I never tried to paint.'

'Oh! That is very strange, because it is the only thing I can do at all. In that respect Valentine is like you. I suppose you cannot embroider? I am clever in embroidery.'

'No, unfortunately. But I can make Latin and Greek verses: that is perhaps a branch of embroidery.'

'If you could make English verses I would claim this as a point of resemblance. Are you clever at sums?'

'No, not very.'

'Oh! I am sorry, because I am. Now Valentine can never add anything correctly. Are you—tidy?'

'No, not at all.'

'I am so glad, because I am the most untidy person in the world, and Valentine is the neatest. Her room is like a ship's cabin. Are you fond of dogs and animals?'

'Not very.'

'What a pity! because I am; and I have the most lovely dogs at home—in the country you know. I would not let the poor things come to town. But Valentine does not care much for them. Do you like music?'

'Yes; but I cannot play.'

'Well, I can play, I suppose, but Valentine is really a musician, not an amateur. Well, Claude, this is most exasperating, because one moment you are like Valentine and the next you are like me. Is there anything else that you can do?'

'I know one or two modern languages and a little law. And I can row a little, play cricket a little, play tennis a little——'

'We can play lawn-tennis too. Claude,' —she lowered her voice again—'never mind the points of resemblance. But, oh! it was a truly dreadful afternoon. My poor brother!'

What she meant was that if she, in one interview, found Melenda so unspeakably dreadful, what must be his own feelings about her when he had always known her?

'As for me,' he replied, intelligently answering her unspoken question, 'Melenda has always been my sister. I am used to her. But of course she has not been yours.'

'Spare us another interview, Claude. I am selfish, I know. But I cannot bear to go there again—just yet.'

'You shall not go again unless you wish.

Violet. I am afraid she was — well — outspoken.'

'She was --unspeakable.'

This was true, and the fact is a sufficient excuse for the silence of history as regards her actual words. History, like schoolmaster Sam in his class-room, is perpetually wiping out something with a sponge. Also, like Sam, History has a board as black as Erebus itself to write upon.

'Yes;' it was Jack Conyers' voice, which was not loud but penetrating, and he was talking with Valentine. 'Yes; since I saw you in Florence I have been irresistibly forced to devote myself wholly to Art. Such other personal ambitions as I may have cherished are now altogether abandoned.'

'Indeed! But there is nothing more delightful than Art, Mr. Conyers, or more honourable, is there?'

'I shall hope to see you and your sister in my studio some happy day, Miss Valentine. My picture will not be completed and ready for exhibition for three or four years more. But my friends will be allowed to see it in progress.'

'I hope we shall see it in the Academy or the Grosvenor.'

He put up his hands and shuddered gently.

'Not that,' he murmured; 'anything but that.'

'Claude,' said Violet, 'that is the man who paid us so much attention last winter in Florence. He really was very useful to us; and he divided his attentions equally, you see, so as to prevent mistake.'

'What mistake?'

'Why, you silly boy, he might have made love to Polly instead of to Beatrice. He has had ten minutes with Valentine, and now he will come to me. Do you believe in him?'

'I knew him at Cambridge. We thought he was clever.'

'He talks perpetually about himself, as if he very much wished to be thought clever; and —I don't know—but there does not seem always the right ring about him. Does there? He isn't real.'

Presently Claude's turn came with Lady Mildred. She was always gracious—always a *grande dame de par le monde*—but she had

never been more gracious or greater than that evening, when she found her opportunity to say a few words for his own ear.

'Do you remember, Claude,' she asked him, 'a certain day twelve years ago when I took you to the opera, and told you that if you wished you could take your own place among the people you saw there?'

'I remember all that you ever told me, Lady Mildred.'

'Well, the time has come; you may take your place. I will, if you please, place you in as good a set as anyone can desire. It helps a young man to be seen occasionally in society.'

'I have never thought much of society. My ambition has always been to justify——'

'I know it has, Claude. You have more than justified what was done for you at first. Otherwise, should I have made you known to your sister?'

'But you allowed me to take them to——'

'Yes, Claude. Your sister ought to know her relations. She need not associate with them unless she pleases. Perhaps she would not quite appreciate you unless she understood what you had done. I want her to be proud of you, Claude.'

'Thank you,' he said.

'You think—you feel—that success and personal distinction will satisfy your soul, Claude?'

'Why,' he replied, wondering, 'what else is there? We are all fighting for place of some kind, and I am fighting for a front place.'

'And you think you will be happy when you get that place?'

'I am sure that nothing else will make me happy. Why do you ask, Lady Mildred?'

'Be happy, my dear boy, in any way you can. Only do not be quite sure that there is no other ambition possible for you.'

Claude walked away with Conyers about midnight. His friend was not quite satisfied. He had not discovered anything, and he doubted whether he had made it quite certain that he was going to be a great painter.

'Well,' he said, 'have you learned anything yet—the truth about these young ladies? That is, if it is not a secret of state.'

'Not a secret of state at all. Only that we do not know. Lady Mildred will tell us when she pleases.'

They smoked their cigarettes in silence for a while.

'Jack,' said Claude, after a pause, 'about that girl—the girl you were talking about—you know—the girl with the eyes and the possible face—the girl you talked of making your model.'

'I remember. What about her?'

'Don't do it, Jack. Let the girl stay. I have been quite lately among girls of her class. Such a girl might very well be my own sister. Leave her alone, Jack.'

'My dear fellow, out of half a million girls—but have it your own way. There are plenty of models, though not many with such eyes. But have it your own way. As if any girl could be harmed by devoting herself to the service of Art!'

'Yes,' said Claude, 'the same thing used to be said in Cyprus when they wanted a girl to devote herself to the service of Aphrodite.'

'If the girl would sit to me I would paint her. That is all. But you are quite right, Claude. It would be a pity to turn her head. She shall stay with her friends and go on with her sewing, so far as I am concerned.'

CHAPTER VIII.

ALICIA.

'Well, Jack, as you have not thought fit to call upon me, I have come to call upon you.'

His visitor was a woman no longer in her first youth, but not yet much past thirty; of an age when one begins to say of a woman that she still keeps her good looks—a handsome woman, large-limbed and tall, with full cheek and smiling mouth; a good-tempered woman, yet one who knew her own mind and had her own way. And though she laughed, her eyes had a look in them which made Jack, who felt guilty, wish that the visit was over.

'Thank you,' he said. 'It has been very rude of me, but I have been getting settled. You know that I have at last taken a studio.'

'Really! You may call me Alicia, you know, Jack, just as you used to do. I am glad to hear that you have begun to do some work.'

'I have begun my Work.' There is a subtle distinction between beginning to work and beginning one's Work.

'Oh! And—meanwhile, Jack?'

He met those eyes and blushed.

'Meanwhile?' she repeated. 'A man can't make himself an independent gentleman quite for nothing, and you've been playing that game now for five years. And a man can't make money by painting, unless he is mighty lucky, all at once. Therefore, meanwhile, Jack, and until the money begins to come in?'

'What do you mean?' But he knew very well what she meant, because this lady knew all his family history and the exact amount of the fortune—a very little one—with which he had started, and it was no use making pretences with her: very few women are so considerate with men as to help them along with their little pretences.

'I mean, how are you going to live?'

'Like the sparrows, I suppose—somehow.'

'Sparrows don't belong to clubs, and haven't a taste for claret, and don't pay a hundred and twenty pounds a year for rent. Now, I'm not going to let you take any of

their money from the girls—they've got little enough, Lord knows.'

'I do not propose to rob my sisters, Alicia.'

'Then you will be wanting money very badly indeed before long. Besides, you never will make any by honest work. You can't paint, Jack, that is the truth, and you never will be able. What is the use of deceiving yourself? I didn't live eight years with my poor old man without learning something about pictures. Look here, now.' She took up one of the small portraits on the mantelshelf. 'Here's a thing! Yours, of course. Here's flesh—like putty! The eyes are not straight, and there's no more feeling about the lips than—well—and the worst of it is, you'll never learn. My old man wouldn't have given you half a crown for such a thing. No, you'll never learn, for your only chance is to begin at the bottom of the ladder, where everybody must begin. But you're too conceited for that. Oh! you're a genius, I know, and painting comes by nature, we all know that.'

Jack reddened with anger. But he answered mildly, because for many reasons he could not quarrel with this plain-speaking lady.

'Really, Alicia, you carry the license of old friendship too far.'

'Not a bit too far, Jack. It does you good to hear the truth. Who was this girl whose head you've got here? I seem to know her face. Some model, I suppose. She sat to you and you paid her a few francs, and now you've stuck her over your mantelpiece for your friends to see, and you pretend she was in love with you, and you brag about your conquests——' A cruelly truthful woman, because that was just exactly what Jack had done. Men like Jack Conyers always do this kind of thing. 'Pretty conquests!'

'Did you come here, Alicia, on purpose to insult and wound me?'

'Not on purpose. But I certainly came to have it out with you.'

She sat down, as if to contemplate the situation.

'Patience has limits, Jack, I warn you. It may seem to you easy as well as honourable to look out for a better match in society, and to throw me over if you succeed. Well, I don't think you will succeed. For you see, not many ladies, old or young, in society have got

two thousand a year. And what have you got to offer them in exchange for their money, because they are not likely to give themselves away for nothing? If you haven't got fortune or family or brains, what have you got? Pretence—pretence of genius—sham and pretence. It's too thin, Jack. It won't stand washing. Besides, things will have to come out. Fancy your having to confess the little facts you have put away so carefully! Nobody in society cares where you come from so long as you can behave yourself and amuse people. All they want is to be amused; but when it comes to marrying, questions will be asked, my dear boy—will have to be answered too. Don't look so savage, Jack. Your father wasn't much, was he? And mine wasn't in a very lofty social position, was he? And my poor dear old man made his business in the picture-dealing line, didn't he? But then, you see, I don't pretend.'

'I suppose it is not a crime to desire social position,' said the young man humbly. 'I did not say I was trying to marry anybody. Can't I desire social position and success in my Art?'

'Desire away, Jack; desire as much as

you like. But how, meanwhile, I ask again, are you going to live? And how long do you think I shall let you play fast and loose with me? This kind of thing will not continue for ever.'

Jack murmured that he had no wish at all to play fast and loose with her.

'Look here, then,' she said, 'I will meet you half way. I will give you the rest of the summer. Have your fling; have your shy at an heiress. The season is nearly over. I won't give you longer than the summer. Then you must come back to me for good or not at all.'

Jack made no reply. I think, however, that in his heart he was grateful both for the length of the rope and the chance at the end of it.

'I know exactly what kind of life you desire. Your name sounds good, and you want to be thought of a good old family. You could hide the family shop, because the name wasn't over the door, and you lived at Stockwell. You want to be thought a man of great refinement, and you want to be thought a genius.'

'You can say what you like in these rooms, Alicia.'

'I know I can. You also want all the solid comforts. As for them, I can give them to you: and some of the other things as well. You shall pretend to be a genius, if you like —I'm sure, I don't care what you pretend. I'll give you an allowance to keep up appearances with—as for its extent, that will depend on your behaviour—yes'— for Jack's face showed a disposition to be restive— 'married women's property is their own nowadays, remember.'

'Oh! keep your property.'

'You shouldn't have made love to me, Jack, a year ago, unless you intended to hear the truth.'

'You certainly make the most of your privilege.'

'Oh! Jack, you have always been such a tremendous humbug. You were a humbug when you were a boy and used to brag about the great things you meant to do, and all the time the other boys walking past you easily. Then, you must become a gentleman, and must needs go to Cambridge and spend most of your

little fortune there, pretending all the time that your father wasn't——'

'That is quite enough, Alicia!'

'Why, Jack, weren't the two shops side by side, your father's and mine? And didn't we go to church together? And didn't we go to the theatre together? And didn't you tell me everything? Why shouldn't we speak plain, you and me? When I married my poor dear old man, didn't I promise and vow that you and me should continue friends? You, a great man! You, a great genius! Oh no! But you can look the part, and that is something, isn't it? Good-bye, my dear boy. I don't like you so well as when you were a boy and made us laugh with your conceit, being always as conceited as Old Nick. Come and have dinner with me to night. I won't interfere with your heiress-hunting. Nobody but yourself, and a bottle of the poor old man's best claret. Good-bye, Jack. Dinner at half-past six sharp.'

She lingered a moment and looked at the three portraits again. Then she burst into a loud laugh, natural, long, and hearty: 'Don Juan! Conqueror of hearts! Oh! we poor

women, how he makes our hearts bleed! I thought I knew the face. Why, I know them all three now. And, Jack, it is really too thin. Every picture dealer knows them. I've got 'em all at home. This one is a Frenchwoman, and sits in Paris. She's been Cleopatra and Ninon Longclothes, and anything else you please; and this is an Italian creature who's Venus coming out of the sea or a Nymph bathing—we've got her in both characters on the staircase wall. The Venus was put up at a hundred, but my old man never got his price. And the third sits for a Spanish girl, with a guitar, you know—which is stale business now —peeping behind a lattice or kneeling in church. Oh! Jack, Jack, what a terrible humbug you are!'

CHAPTER IX.

SAM.

THERE remained Sam.

After the embarrassments already twice caused by the introduction of the Duplicated Polly, Claude thought it would be best to explain beforehand. He did this, therefore, by letter, and invited her brother to meet the doubtful sister in his own chambers on the Sunday morning.

Sam accepted, but without enthusiasm. He already had one sister of whom he was ashamed, because she remained in poverty. Very likely the other would be just like her and an additional clog on his own respectability. Sam was one of that numerous tribe which dislikes the family clog. Claude, in his letter, spoke of the new sister as a young lady, but then the word Lady in these days of equality covers so wide an area. This is quite

right, because, why should a title so gracious and beautiful be limited to the House of Peers and the narrow class of Armigeri?

Yet, everybody must not use it: it has still a distinctive meaning; it has a lower limit, except in the mind of the omnibus conductor, who employs it as a synonym for Madame. Melenda, for instance, was below that limit. She could be properly described as a Young Girl, which is the general name for the work-woman in youth, but no one would think of calling her a young lady. One who is employed in a shop; one who has been called to the Inner Bar; one who is in the ballet; one who is in the Front with the playbills, may be a young lady: but not a work-girl. Sam very naturally concluded that his other sister—the young lady—would be following such occupation, and he saw no reason for joy at the new addition to the family circle. But he was not unkind: it was only natural, after all, that Polly, on returning to the family circle, should wish to see the brother who had so greatly distinguished himself: the fame and rumour of his own rise had, no doubt, reached her wondering ears; a man's relations only really begin to rally

round him when he has shown how strong and tough and brave he is. Sam promised, therefore, to give up a portion of his Sunday morning to family affection. He kept that promise, and when he arrived in King's Bench Walk he found the girls waiting for him.

He was not, however, prepared for the sight of two young ladies, the like of whom he had never before encountered, either for appearance, or for dress, or for manners. They do not make girls, at least not many girls, after this pattern in Haggerston, where Sam's school is situated.

'One of these young ladies, Sam,' said Claude, 'is your sister, but, as I have already told you, we do not know which.'

Sam looked from one to the other, reddening and confused. Their eyes did not say, 'Is this the great and distinguished Sam?' Not at all: their expression conveyed another question, which he was quite sharp enough to read, namely, 'What will Sam be like?' One after the other gave him her hand, which Sam accepted with a pump-handle movement, saying to each, 'How de do?' just as if they had met after only a week's absence. Then he re-

covered, in some sort, the sense of himself and his own greatness, and he thought of the awe which he was doubtless inspiring, though the girls concealed it. Yet he was fain to mop his face with a pocket-handkerchief, and he said it was a hot morning, and in his agitation he dropped the aspirate, about which he was sensitive, because his own was the only aspirate to be found in all Haggerston except in church, and he mopped his face again. Then he found a chair and sat down. In this position he immediately rallied and stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat armholes. This is not the most graceful attitude possible for a man, but it suited Sam better than some others would have done. He could not, for instance, stand, like Claude, with no support or background; nor could he lean gracefully over a mantelshelf. He wanted an attitude which should convey a sense of strength and of complete self-satisfaction.

'You don't know which is Polly, Claude?' he asked, looking from one to the other as if they had been a pair of lay figures. 'Well, I'm sure I can't remember. Never mind, my

dears,' he added, with a reassuring nod, 'I'll call you both my sisters.'

Claude had used almost the same words, but somehow the effect produced was different. Violet turned away her eyes and Valentine gravely inclined her head.

Sam, as regards the outer man, which people insist on taking in evidence as regards the unseen soul, was stout and strongly built, with square shoulders. He was under the middle height, and his legs, if one must speak the truth, were short and curly. This is considered to be a sign of strength, though it is the line of beauty in the wrong place. His face as well as his legs showed strength; his forehead was broad and square; his sharp eyes were set back under thick red eyebrows; his coarse red hair rose from his forehead like a cliff; his nose, if short, was also broad; his mouth was firm, and his chin square. Never was there a stronger or more determined-looking young man. Never, certainly, if attitude and expression go for anything, was a young man more self-sufficient.

'You heard, of course,' he said, amiably, 'how your brother had got on in the world,

and then you naturally wanted to see him. Well, here I am. Only don't look to me for a shove up. Everybody for himself, I say.'

'We will not ask anyone for a "shove up,"' said Violet, 'even though we do belong to the poor.'

'The poor?' Sam started in his chair and turned red. 'What do you mean by the poor? You belong to the working class, not the poor. The poor? Why, you are the great backbone of the country.'

'Am I?' Violet replied. 'Then if all the country has to depend upon——'

'The mainstay and support of the nation,' Sam continued. 'Don't let me hear you call the working class the poor again. One would think you came out of the Union.'

I am told that people in very high place are positively ignorant of rank in the middle class, and actually regard the general practitioner's lady as of no higher position than the wife of the leading draper, and the Vicar's young ladies as occupying the same level as the auctioneer's daughters. In the same way it is difficult to understand that there is rank and position among working people; so that before

one gets to the Poor, properly so called, one has to go very far down. They are, in fact, like the Rich who continually recede the more one advances, so that one begins to suspect that there are no Rich left in this Realm of England.

'Very likely I did come out of the Union,' Violet replied, desperately. Was there no graciousness among the Monument family? 'Why should we not come out of the Union?'

'As for that,' Sam continued, 'I suppose you know nothing about your own family. I always said it was folly letting a girl be brought up by her natural enemies.'

'Why,' asked Valentine, 'why her natural enemies?'

'Of course, you know nothing. Who are the enemies of the working man unless it's the people who live upon him? Answer me that. What have your friends done for their living—eh? Answer me that.' He became suddenly quite fierce, and looked exactly like Melenda. His eyes glowed like hers, and he turned upon Valentine almost wrathfully. 'Of course you've been taught to look down upon the working classes and call them the Poor, and that you must be good to the Poor. Why, look at the

way you're dressed. Should a decent working man's sister go about with gold chains and silk frocks and kid gloves?'

'You see, Val,' said Violet to Valentine, 'Joe told us the same thing. We shall both have to dress like Melenda.'

'Joe isn't a fool,' said Sam, 'though he's ignorant.'

'Pray tell us all the faults you have to find with us,' said Valentine. 'If we know what they are, we may correct them. We have certainly been taught kindness to poor people, and we have not been taught to despise working men. But go on.'

'I don't want to find fault with you,' Sam replied, more gently, 'only for luxury and laziness and living on other people's labour.'

'You read about the luxury and laziness in your papers, my brother,' said Claude. He had been standing in the window looking on without remark. 'Always verify your facts, Sam. I am sure you will not object to that rule. Ask them what they have learned. You will find that their record of work is as good, perhaps, as your own.'

'Yes, I know: learning to play music and to read French and paint and make pretty things and to dress up fine. Well, I don't say it is your faults. You can't help it. I hear you've been to see my mother and you've set her back up; and you've seen Joe, and he wants to know what it means, and what you're going to do—whichever of you it is—for a living when her ladyship is tired of you. And you've seen Melenda, and she flew out, being driven most out of her wits by hard work and being always hungry. And now you've seen me.'

'Yes,' said Violet. This young lady really could convey more meaning in a single word than others can in fifty. 'Yes.'

Claude's eyes brightened and Valentine looked anxious. But Sam observed nothing. Half tones were in fact lost upon him.

'Yes, now you've seen me. All the rest of them are proud of me, and I'm proud of myself.'

'I dare say,' said Valentine, because Violet smiled, which might be considered an aggressive movement. 'I dare say we shall be proud of you as we are of Claude when we know you.'

'Of Claude?' Sam snorted, and drew his feet under his chair. 'As proud as you are of Claude? Why, do you know what I am?' He swelled out his chest and squared his elbows. 'Do you know what I am? I'm the Master of a Board School. Do you know what that means?'

'Sam has every reason to be proud,' said Claude. 'When he was only a boy he resolved on making himself a master in a school, and he has done it. He taught himself mostly; I have been taught.'

Sam then proceeded to give a short sketch of his own progress, showing how he had scaled Alps, levelled great rocks, crossed mighty floods, in his single-handed struggle. The story lost nothing by being told by the hero. Few stories do, which you may prove by referring to the pages of any contemporary biography. 'And for the future,' he concluded, 'remember that you will have to deal with the Schoolmaster. The working men are the masters of the country, and we are the masters of the working men. They are looking to us already. We are going to be their leaders.'

'The House of Commons,' said Claude, 'will

shortly be composed entirely of elementary schoolmasters.'

'As soon as members are paid,' Sam replied, 'there will be a good many. And the more the better. The time has come when you must have men in the House who know something—not Latin and Greek, mind, but something useful. What geography do they know, now? Nothing at all. With English possessions and colonies all over the world, the members know nothing of geography. There isn't a Sixth Standard boy who wouldn't be ashamed of the way they talk and the blunders they make. What do they know about trade and manufactures? Nothing. What do they know about the working man? Nothing. As for us, we do know him.'

'Do you influence him much?' asked Violet, innocently, so that I do not know what it was that made Valentine look alarmed.

'Not so much as we would. They won't let us teach him the truth at school. The Code won't let us—they know very well why. We've got to waste the time teaching him things that will never be any use to him, such as

spelling. What's the good of spelling to a man who never writes? And if you do write, what's the odds to a working man whether he spells right or wrong? But we must not teach the rights of humanity. We mustn't tell the boys anything about them. It would be difficult to examine for a grant in the Rights of Man, wouldn't it? and dangerous for some of the Committee of Council. But we know what the working men want and what they mean to have.'

'Tell us what do they mean to have,' said Valentine.

'What's the use?' It was curious to mark how Sam's rugged face leaped suddenly into rage and even ferocity, and then as suddenly dropped into gentleness. He was quite gentle now, as he answered, looking with a sort of pity upon a creature so beautiful, so dainty, and so unfit for the stern realities of life.

'What's the use?' he said. 'You are a young lady now and you belong to our enemies. What's the use of frightening you? Go home and enjoy yourself and eat and drink.'

'But tell us,' she persisted.

'I think we had better go home—and eat and drink,' said Violet.

'Sam thinks his own opinions are those of all the working men,' said Claude. 'It is not unusual when people think strongly. Tell them your opinions, Sam.'

'They are not my opinions only,' said Sam; 'don't think it. Well, if you ain't afraid, I am going to tell you just exactly what we mean to do—I and my friends—with you and your friends. You don't know and you don't suspect: it's just the same ignorance that was in France before the Revolution. One or two suspected what was coming, but most thought everything was going on for ever just the same. Very well. Don't you girls go away and say afterwards that you were left in ignorance. Go home and tell your friends that the working men of this country are going to have a Republic at last; not what your friends think and call a Republic, but the real thing. In a real Republic every man must be equal, so we shall of course abolish the Lords and all titles and privileged classes. As for the land, it belongs to the people; so we shall take the land and it shall be cultivated for the

nation. And if anybody wants to be a priest, he may if he likes, after his day's work; for of course we shall disestablish the Church and take over Church property of all the churches for the good of the State. There shall be in our Republic no lazy parsons and ministers living on the people; and there shall be no lawyers, because there will be free justice, and every man may have his case heard for nothing by a jury, and juries will sit every day if they are wanted. There will be no masters, employers, or capitalists, but equal wages for all and the same hours of work, with extra rations for those who have got children to support. There will be free education; there will be no idlers; everybody will be a working man. We shall take over all the railways, abolish the National Debt and the local debts. There will be no tradesmen, because the State—that is, the People—will keep the stores and distribute food and clothing. There will be no rates or taxes, because there will be no money, and labour will be the only coin, and everybody will pay his share by his own labour. There will be annual parliaments sitting every day all the year round, and nobody allowed to

speak for more than five minutes. There will be, of course, manhood suffrage.'

'Will women vote?' asked Violet.

'Certainly not,' Sam replied, with decision. 'Women can't govern. Besides, they can't be trusted to work for the public good: they would want private property restored, and they'd set up a church and try to fix things so that their own sons should have nothing to do. Women haven't got any sense of justice.'

'Delightful,' said Violet. 'I was afraid I might be called upon to assist in governing.'

'Pray go on,' said Valentine.

'There will be plenty for all and no luxury. There will be no saving money, because there will be no money to save, and everybody will have to work, whether he likes it or not, until he is sixty, and then he will be maintained by the State. All buying and selling will be in the hands of the State. The great houses will be turned into museums; the private parks will be either cultivated or turned into public gardens. Now, do you begin to understand?'

'I think I do,' said Valentine. 'When is all this to be begun?'

'I don't know. Perhaps in a year or two

—perhaps in ten years. We are educating the people. We shall try to keep back those who want to act at once until everybody has been taught our principles.'

'Sam is a Socialist,' Claude explained. 'I ought to have told you that before you came.'

'Why, listen to this.' Sam was thoroughly roused by this time. 'Here are facts for you. Claude can't deny this.' He sprang to his feet and stood over Valentine with flaming eyes, breathing like a bull, and hammering his facts into the palm of his left hand with the most determined forefinger ever seen. 'Look at this. . . .' Here followed an avalanche of facts. 'What, I say, have the capitalist and the landlord done that they should get seventy per cent. of the working man's harvest? When our men are in they will get the whole for themselves. Talk of compensation! Do you compensate a pickpocket when you take the purse out of his hands? Vested rights? Rights of robbery. We shall take all—land, houses, wealth, and all—and we shall give them to the People, to whom they belong.'

By this time the indignation of the prophet had touched his lips with fire, and he went on

to arraign the class of those who have great possessions with extraordinary vehemence and passion, and prophesied their overthrow, like another Ezekiel. Violet looked on and wondered, thinking how very much he resembled Melenda. Valentine looked on and wondered, because up to that time she had only heard vaguely of the extreme wickedness of the wealthy class, and because she could not understand at all how they were so wicked, or why they were going to be so dreadfully punished, or what this new world of the Socialist would be like. She was reassured by the attitude of Claude, who still stood at the window gravely listening, but without the least assent in his face or emotion in his grave eyes.

'And now you know,' Sam concluded, 'something of what is coming, not in this country only, but everywhere. Oh! yes: in the United States, which they pretend to be a land of freedom, and it's a worse country for the working man than this, even. Perhaps it will come there first; and in France, which they pretend to be a Republic—a fine Republic!—and in Germany and Russia, where they don't pretend to anything but despotism, kept up with

millions of bayonets for the luxury of the privileged class. Then there shall be no more riches and no more poverty, no more rich and no more poor, no more luxury and no more starvation. If you are wise you will come over to us at once.' He seized Valentine's hand and held it tightly. 'Come out of it, I say, before the house falls down about your ears. Some declare that it is going to be a bloodless revolution, but I know better. There is too much to lose—money and rank and state and the easy life. Oh! yes—the easy life. They won't give these things up without a fight; they will fight to the death to defend their possessions. They will have all the shopkeepers and the merchants and the professional people on their side, and at first they will have the soldiers. It will be the working man against the world. It will be a great and terrible struggle. There can be no Revolution—it isn't in the nature of things—without fighting and rivers of blood. Come over to us, you two. I don't care which of you is my sister; you may both call yourselves Polly if you like, and I'll stand by you both. But leave Claude and leave your friends and come over to us.'

'How shall we live if we do?' asked Valentine.

'We will find something for you. Not button-holes to sew, like Melenda's work, but something that a decent girl can do. You've been educated, I suppose, in your finicking way. You know something besides looking pretty and putting on fine clothes. Perhaps it's not too late for Board School teaching if you're clever enough. You are the one for school-work'—he indicated Valentine; 'you wouldn't be afraid, and you are strong. As for you——'

'What could I do?' asked Violet.

'I don't know. You don't look fit for much. Well, every girl can sew if you come to the worst. But there; you've heard what is coming—the greatest Revolution that the world has ever seen, and the People to the front with a rush. When that rush begins——'

'A good many will be carried off their legs,' said Claude.

Sam made no reply. He had worked himself up to the redhot pitch and was now cooling down. He was a little ashamed, too, because Claude remained unmoved. As for the girls, he had certainly succeeded in animating one

with his dream of the people, and frightening the other by his vehemence. But he cared nothing for that—anybody can work upon the emotions of women. But Claude, who ought to have argued with him or confessed himself conquered, listened without the least sign of being moved. Yet he listened with attention, as if he had not heard it all a dozen times before. He could not complain that he had not heard the Socialist's arguments.

Sam went away. The courts of the Temple were deserted. He thought of the coming Millennium, when there should be no lawyers at all, but Justice should be free. As these courts were on that Sunday morning, so should they be every morning, in the glorious future of the Socialist, empty and untrodden, except by the feet of the children playing in their gardens. No more lawyers! He had no personal experience of lawyers, but yet his heart glowed within him at the prospect of their suppression. He passed under the cloisters beside the old church. Through the open doors he heard the rolling of the organ and the sweet pure voice of a boy who was singing a solo part in an

anthem of prayer and praise. The very sweetness of the music irritated him, but he consoled himself with the thought that religion would shortly be entirely abolished, and that the sensitive ears of such thinkers as himself should no longer be annoyed with the singing of hymns. The Templars' church would be as empty and as deserted as the chambers and courts without. He passed into Fleet Street. All the shops were closed. Why, so it should be every morning and all the year round as soon as his friends were in power. Not a single shop should be left. No more trade, no more masters, no more buying and selling for profit. So, well satisfied with the prospect, Sam went his way.

In the evening there was to be a great social gathering of a certain branch of the Democratic Federation Union, at which some of the members were going to perform a play, and others were to sing and recite, and he himself was to address the meeting. It was going to be an occasion of some importance, and Sam was only sorry that he had not invited the two girls to be present. The evening would have opened their eyes. And though

Sam professed to despise women, and was in no hurry to hamper himself by marriage, he did very well understand that the adhesion of two such pretty and well-dressed girls to the Cause, which is at present sadly to seek in the matter of young ladies, would greatly stimulate waverers and bring enthusiasm into the ranks. There is no leader in the world like a girl, if one can be found capable and courageous; but such a girl is rare.

'You have heard Sam's creed,' said Claude; 'he believes it, every word.'

'After all,' said Violet, 'I can sew. Girls can do so much.'

'And I,' said Valentine, 'can teach after my finicking education. But, Claude, a world with no poverty and no suffering——'

'Come,' said Violet, 'you must not even talk of it, Val dear, or we shall have you going over to the Socialists. Let us remain with our natural enemies, and eat and drink as much as we possibly can before we are drowned in Sam's rivers of blood. Claude, you will come to luncheon with us, won't you?' She heaved a deep sigh, which expressed some hidden

emotion. 'We have now seen Sam. He lives a long way off, does he not? We shall see him again, perhaps, when he is President of the Socialist Republic and chopping off everybody's head with tremendous energy.'

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT RENUNCIATION.

Blessed above their fellows are those who can find relief for an overcharged mind by drawing —I do not mean the sweet copying of flower, fern, and tall grass, but the drawing of faces, heads, and figures, so that in times of oppression and affliction one can caricature one's enemy by representing him as a fool, an ass, a beast, a fox, or a serpent. This is the reason why the London School Board has thoughtfully introduced drawing into the schools, so that work-girls shall be enabled, in their after life, to find some relief and consolation. In the rare times of joy, in the same way, the multiplication of one's friends' portraits increases one's delight, and in times of doubt one can prevent the subject from harassing the mind by drawing likenesses of the personages concerned. Thus, it was highly disagreeable to Violet to think

of Joe, with his grimy hands and smeared face and working-man's garb, as perhaps her brother. It was equally disagreeable for her to think that he was perhaps Valentine's brother. She drew him, therefore, in various positions, all more or less ridiculous, but especially that when he sat upon the table and grinned. This greatly relieved her soul. In the same way Sam, who was to her a much more objectionable character, lost half his terrors when she had drawn him triumphantly seated in the Revolutionary Car of Juggernaut, or flourishing with zeal an executioner's axe, or calmly cutting off heads so as to make everybody the same size. But she could not draw Melenda. There are limits even to this artistic method of consolation.

Valentine had no such relief. Like Saul in his trouble, she turned to music for consolation, but found little. Joe and Rhoda and the blind old lady and Sam were nothing. As connections they were not, it is true, gentlefolk, but they were such as anyone might possess without either shame or pride. Nobody in these days really thinks—though they may pretend—any the better or any the worse of a man for having brothers and cousins who

are carpenters or counts, baronets or bakers, Comtists or Baptists, Socialists or Red Republicans, Mormons or Methodists, because a man can no longer as in the good old days acquire fame or notoriety or disgrace by professing any trade or holding any form of belief whatever, unless, indeed, one were to go round with detonators and boxes of whitish paste, and profess himself a practical dynamiter. Sam was a very possible brother, and interesting in his self-sufficiency, his conceit, and his extreme views of politics. But besides Sam and Joe, there was Melenda. For nearly a week Valentine went about with a grisly spectre always before her eyes—the spectre of the workgirl, half-starved, over-worked, resigned, in a rage, uncomplaining. When Sam proclaimed his gospel of universal plenty, she thought of the happy change it would work for Melenda and her friends; when he sat at dinner she thought of Melenda's cold tea with bread-and-butter; when she went to her own chamber at night, she saw before her those three girls crouching together on their miserable bed in the wretched room; always day and night there was present in her mind

that little group of sewing girls; always the hollow eyes of one gazed reproachfully at her from the bed, saying, 'Why will you still torment me so? What have I done?' and the large heavy eyes of the other raised in wonder that all women were not as she herself, the uncared-for slave of manufacturers, born to be expended in toil; and the fierce eyes of the third girl asking her how she dared in the insolence of her own luxury and happiness to mock the misery of her sister.

And then she made up a Scheme. No one but Violet knew of it, and when Valentine opened up the subject she first laughed at it and then cried over it. Gautama himself did not devise a more complete thing, so far as it went. No self-tormentor in Egyptian Laura or Syrian desert or Galilean cave ever proposed for himself a thing of greater discomfort.

And then she told Claude.

'It is impossible,' he said at once, without the least hesitation. Every really great scheme is always declared impossible until it has been carried out, when it is perceived to have been a perfectly easy thing, and nothing to brag about. Anybody might have done it.

'Oh, Claude!' her face fell; 'and I looked forward so confidently to your help.'

'Let us find some other way for you.'

'There can be no other way. Don't you see, Claude? There is my own sister—my sister and yours. Think how she is living; think of her miserable days. I must go and stay with her. I must help her. I dare say she will try to drive me away. Very well. I will not be driven away.'

'But it is impossible, Valentine. You don't know what it is you propose to do.'

The difficulties were in fact enormous. But many enormous difficulties, when faced, turn out to be like the lions which faced Christian with angry roar, and so much terrified that greatly tried pilgrim. The lions are chained, and can do no harm. Or they turn out to be mere goblins, like those gruesome and shapeless and nameless things which whispered horrible suggestions into the pilgrim's ear when he was nervously staggering along that Valley.

'It is quite impossible, Valentine,' Claude repeated. 'It would kill you. Their life is not yours.'

'I will make it mine. Oh, Claude! I

thought I should have had your sympathy at least.'

The tears stood in her eyes. All night long she had been lying awake filled and possessed by the thought. In the morning it only showed fairer and more beautiful than in the night.

'They are my own people, Claude.'

'I do not know that. Besides, how are you to live among them? Will you stay with my brother Joe? or with my mother? or with Sam?'

'Neither. I intend to live with Melenda, or at least as close to her as can be managed. Where she lives I can live.'

'But you have seen that Melenda lives in the very poorest way possible. Why, from a single visit it is impossible even to realise how poor and squalid is her life. Things that she does not mind at all would be simply intolerable to you.'

'No, Claude. Whatever Melenda endures I can endure.'

Claude shook his head.

'And then the place, and the people, and the language, and the drunkenness—oh, Valentine, it is quite—quite impossible.'

'Think less of the difficulties and more of what I could do for our sister, Claude—she is our sister, you know—if I went and lived with her. Sit down and think about that. Think a little, Claude.'

Claude sat down to think, and Valentine had recourse to white witchcraft.

Every woman—fortunately very few women fully realise this great truth—can do with every man whatever she pleases, provided, first, that she is young and beautiful; next, that the man is a man of imagination and possessed of a right feeling for the sex; and thirdly, that she has the mastery over some musical instrument. All these conditions were satisfied in the case of Claude and Valentine.

Then Valentine began to play. First she played a solemn march with full strong chords—a march full of hope and high resolve—and she watched Claude furtively. Presently the music entered into his soul, and he was fain to rise and to walk about the room. When his step quickened and his eye brightened she changed the music, and began to play one of those songs which need no words, because, when they are played, the thoughts rise naturally to

the level of the song and flow rhythmically, and great ideas take form and shape. And still she watched him. Then she changed the air again and played a simple Scotch ditty, one of those which go straight to the heart, because they came originally from the heart. When she saw that his eyes were soft and his gaze was far away, she paused abruptly in her playing, and he started.

'I will help you,' he said, 'if I can. I do not know what you will do for Melenda, but you shall try. At all events, you will do something for yourself.'

'That is nothing. I must think of those girls, not of myself.'

'But—Lady Mildred?'

'Let us get everything quite ready first, and then we will go to her with our plan complete and waiting for nothing but her consent. I think she will consent.'

Every scheme, even the noblest, requires machinery and service. Every drama wants to be properly rehearsed and duly mounted. The mounting of the little comedy designed by Valentine was carried out by Claude. It took him two or three days. First he went to Ivy

Lane, and there, unknown to Melenda, who was sitting at work upstairs, he ascertained certain facts connected with the lodgers in the house. The ground floor front was occupied by an elderly gentleman of unknown calling, who was reported to be perfectly quiet and harmless though dreadful poor. The ground floor back was inhabited by an old lady who herself assured Claude of her perfect respectability and unblemished character. If a woman's word is not to be taken for so much, for what can it be taken? As regards her profession, she got occasional employment in the funeral furnishing line. One would not, perhaps, choose this line, but it is necessary to live. Her practice, this lady further explained, in evidence and support of her great respectability, was to 'go in' when the winter approached and to 'come out' for the summer. In this euphemistic manner do some ladies speak of the Union. She was not by any means a nice-looking lady, and she looked as if perhaps some portions of her life had not been spent in honest industry. She also confessed, and denied not, that there were times when the

possession of a little money tempted her to take a glass; but these occasions, she said truthfully, were rare, because she seldom got the money.

The back room upstairs, behind Melenda's, was occupied by a middle-aged single woman, a machinist who made trousers all day long with the help of a sewing machine, and was in even direr straits than Melenda. She accepted a bribe of five shillings and the week's rent and vacated the room, which Claude proceeded to get thoroughly washed, scoured, scrubbed, and repaired. Then he put furniture in it, and that of a kind which made the collector believe that a district visitor at least was coming to live in Ivy Lane. All this he did without the least knowledge or suspicion of Melenda.

When everything was quite ready, Valentine laid her plan before Lady Mildred. With what eloquence she pleaded her cause, with what tears and entreaties, it needs not to relate. These may be understood.

'Let me go, dear,' she concluded. 'Oh, let me go. I have no rest for thinking of those girls — one of them my own sister.

Let me go and live with them for a little while. I am not afraid of anything that may happen to me. I shall be quite safe among them.'

Lady Mildred showed no surprise; nobody is ever surprised in these latter days at any course which is proposed by daughters. She listened patiently, and bade her wait a day for her reply.

Now whenever Lady Mildred had quite made up her mind about the course she would adopt, she invariably went through the formality of consulting her friend, Miss Bertha Colquhoun. In no single case did she ever adopt that friend's advice, which was always contrary to her own opinion. Taking counsel with your friends, in fact, generally means getting an opportunity of putting your opinion into words, and of seeing how it looks. Much the same may be said as regards argument.

'Of course I knew very well,' she said, 'that something would happen when I brought Claude to the house and allowed the girls to visit his relations. I confess, however, that I am a little startled to find them so

differently affected; for Violet is as much repelled by the poverty of the workgirls as Valentine is attracted.'

'But of course, Mildred, even you will not actually suffer Valentine to go and live alone among them?'

'I do not know. Why not?'

'Alone, Mildred? Alone, and among those common people? Your own daughter — well, perhaps your own daughter — brought up as Valentine has been—would you suffer her to run the dreadful and terrible risks of such a thing?'

'What are the terrible risks?'

'Violence — insult — robbery — everything.'

'No; I do not fear these at all. The principal risk is that of learning that the world is really a very wicked place. The new theory about woman's education, that she should not be kept in ignorance of evil any more than the boys, has a good deal to be said for it. Valentine will discover among these people that the world, which has always seemed to her so beautiful and so virtuous, is really full of dark places and injustice.'

'Is that good for a girl to learn?'

'Why not, since it is the truth? Will Valentine be made wicked by the discovery of wickedness? I do not think so.'

'And Violet? Is she to go with her sister?'

'Violet is of less courageous mould. She will remain with me, and we shall go away together somewhere—to Switzerland or the sea-side.'

'You would surely not go away and leave that poor girl alone and unprotected in the awful place she is going to?'

'Yes. But she will not be quite alone; there is that sewing-girl—perhaps her sister. Working-men do not generally insult respectable girls, I have learned, though they are thoughtless about them. I think she will be quite safe with her supposed sister.'

'Well, Mildred, I do not see that any possible good can come of it.'

'Suppose,' she replied, 'a girl were to learn and understand, in this or some other way, some of the worst wrongs that are inflicted on women in this city—wrongs that can only be realised by actually sharing them or

witnessing them day after day; and suppose that she is a brave girl and clear-headed, as well as sound of heart—think, then, what this girl might become and what she might do in after life. My dear Bertha, think of the things you have yourself read and cried over, but never really understood—I mean the ill-treatment and oppression of workgirls. Do you suppose that women could be treated so if we made up our minds that they should not? We cannot believe that the "Song of the Shirt" would have any meaning left at all except an ugly memory, if the women of this country once resolved that it should not. It is forty years and more since Hood wrote that song, and word for word, tear for tear, I am sure that it might be written and sung again this very day. Valentine shall learn for herself. Let her go, and let her—if it must be—suffer.'

In the morning she gave judgment. There were present at this family council, besides the petitioner and Claude, Violet and Bertha. Everybody, except Lady Mildred herself, looked, for some reason or other, guilty. Bertha, because she had not risen to the level of the situation, and still looked on the step

proposed as impossible for a gentlewoman; Violet, because she was ashamed of herself and her own shrinking from the life which Valentine proposed to share; Claude, because he had made all the arrangements beforehand, as if it was quite certain that consent would be obtained, and yet had made them secretly; and Valentine, because she was afraid she might be refused.

'My child,' said Lady Mildred, taking both her hands, 'you have thought seriously and calmly over this scheme of yours? Have you fully considered what it may mean?—that, for instance, it will colour your whole life, and perhaps sadden it; that you go alone among people of whom you know nothing but that they are rude and coarse?'

'Oh, yes,' said Valentine, 'I have thought of that. Claude has told me everything that will happen to me. But I feel as if I must do it.'

'I shall not deny you, Valentine.' Then she turned to Violet. 'And you, my child?'

'No,' said Violet, 'I *could* not do it. I am ashamed of myself. I am a coward, if you please, but I *could* not do it.' She was about

to assign as the reason of her dreadful cowardice her own identity with Polly and her close connection with the Monument family, but she refrained. 'Valentine sees beautiful things where I see nothing but rude manners and coarse speeches. I could not go to live among those people even if Valentine were beside me. And alone!' she shuddered.

'You shall not be asked, my dear.'

'Perhaps it will not be so dreadful as it seems to us,' said Valentine. 'I have repeated it over and over again to myself. Instead of a beautiful home like this, a single room in a row of dingy houses; instead of the open Park, a great nest of mean streets; noise instead of quiet; in place of your kind voices, there will be quarrels of women, cries of children, and bad language of men; in the place of this sweet home——' Here her voice failed her, and the tears came into her eyes, and Violet kissed her with tears of her own.

'As for your going alone,' said Lady Mildred, 'of course the world would disapprove, but then we need not consider much what the world may say. An Eastern lady, I believe, estimates her importance by the care

taken in guarding her. We all come from the East, which accounts for a lingering of the feeling among ourselves. If we do not guard you, my Valentine, the world will say that we do not care for you.'

'But I shall not say so.'

'Tell us, then, exactly, what arrangements you propose to make.'

Claude explained that there was a room—not a large room nor a very pretty room, but a place weatherproof—on the first floor and at the back of Melenda's room; that he had persuaded the tenant to give up this room to himself; that he had caused it to be cleaned, scrubbed, whitewashed, and fumigated; that he had furnished it; and that Valentine could take possession when she pleased.

'And all before I was consulted at all?' said Lady Mildred.

Claude blushed, but did not explain that Valentine had converted him to her view, and that he had done her bidding.

'But who is to do up your room every day?' asked Violet.

Claude had no proposition to make on this important subject. But Valentine confessed,

with a blush and a sigh, because this was a detail less attractive than some others in her scheme, that she would probably have to do it for herself.

'Yourself?' said Violet; 'why, there are a thousand things that have to be done. Who will cook your dinner and make your breakfasts and everything?'

'I suppose I must do all this for myself. Melenda does.'

'Melenda dines off cold tea and bread. She threw the fact at our heads, and reproached us with living on beef and mutton, and eating more than is good for us—you remember, dear?'

'I do not think I can live on tea and bread,' said Valentine; 'but I shall live as simply as I can. And I do not in the least mind boiling a kettle for myself.'

'She will come back,' said Violet, 'with her hands as hard as a housemaid's.'

'Then there are the evenings. What will you do in the evenings?'

'The days are long now. Besides, there is Melenda to cultivate.'

'Yes,' said Violet.

'I will not deny you, my child,' said Lady Mildred. 'You shall have the desire of your heart. But it must be on one or two conditions.'

'Any conditions.'

'Then, first of all, you will persist in the scheme for three months, even if you are lonely and unhappy, even if Melenda turns out more obdurate than you expected, and the life and companionship are far more disagreeable than you ever anticipated. You must not give it up unless you fall ill.'

'I accept that condition willingly,' said Valentine. 'Whether I like it or whether I do not, I will stay there for three months.'

'The next is that you will be completely separated from Violet and myself. We shall go quite out of your way somewhere—I do not know yet where—and stay out of your way all the summer. You will see nothing of us until next October. You will have no letters from us, nor will you write to us. That will be very hard for us, my dear, will it not?'

'It will be very hard for me, and yet I accept.'

'The next condition refers to Claude. It is

that he consents to remain in London all the summer, and that he sees you as often as possible — every day if he can — so that if you fall into any trouble you may always feel that you have some one at hand.'

'That is a condition,' said Claude, 'which I willingly accept.'

'He has already promised it,' said Valentine.

'Then you must promise, next, that you will not try to live like these poor workgirls. Cold tea and dry bread is bad for them, but it would be far worse for you. You will live on something more substantial.'

'That is a very easy condition. I am sure I do not want to live on tea and bread.'

'I have no more conditions to make, my dear. But remember that it is useless to take things which one cannot mend too much to heart. And do not give away money to people; and do not believe everybody's story; and do not entangle yourself with too many friendships.'

'I will try not to make too many friends,' said Valentine.

'And do not give people credit for every

virtue simply because they are poor and live in a single room. I dare say some of the minor vices may be found even in this Arcadia of yours, my dear.'

'Only untidiness at worst,' said Violet sarcastically; 'there cannot possibly be anything more in Ivy Lane.'

'Then,' said Lady Mildred, 'when will you go, my dear?'

'Let me go this very day, lest I get frightened and repent in the night.'

Violet went with her to her own room, where she changed her dress and put on a plain frock of brown stuff made up for the purpose, a simple hat without feathers or ornaments, a grey ulster, and a pair of Swedish kid gloves.

'Oh, Val,' Violet laughed, but the tears were in her eyes, 'you are as much like a London workgirl as a village maid in a comic operetta is like the real rustic. But never mind, my dear, you look as beautiful as the day and as good as any angel, and how, oh, how in the world shall I get on without you?'

Then, together, they packed a box with

things absolutely necessary, and a few books, and all was ready.

'You *can't* be going!' cried Violet, clinging to her. 'Oh, my dear, my dear, it is always you who think and say the best and noblest things. It is because you are Beatrice and I am only Polly, and she is selfish and cannot tear herself from her luxurious life. But you will be the happier of the two. I shall think of you and be ashamed of myself every day that you are gone. If we were really sisters I think I could do what you are doing. But I am only——'

'No, Violet. I am Polly, and the proof is that I am constrained by an irresistible force to go among my own people. Do you think I shall make them love me?'

'Oh, Valentine, can they help it? You will change them all. Sam, after a little of your society, will cease to yearn for his rivers of blood, and Joe will leave off grinning, and Melenda will become as gentle as a turtle-dove.'

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

'I AM YOUR SISTER.'

It was done, then. Valentine sat alone in her hermitage—a single room on the first floor of a tenement house in Ivy Lane, Hoxton. She was in the middle of the great town, but she was as lonely and as far from the world as if it had been the Hermitage on the Coquet River or a cave beside the Brook Cherith. She also realised with wonder how rapidly the greatest events in the world get themselves accomplished. Only two or three hours before she was torn with doubts as to whether this thing would ever be permitted, and lo! it was already done—that is to say, it was begun, because nothing in this human world ever gets itself finished.

Claude carried her box with brotherly care

up the steep and narrow stair, and then looked around expectant, as the railway porter lingereth about the door of the cab. He waited, like the railway porter, for his tip, the meed of praise because he had taken no small pains.

'Tell me,' he said, 'tell me, Valentine, what yon think of it.'

'It is very small. But then I am not very big. And you have made it look pretty. I expected nothing half so pretty as this. Thank you, Claude.'

'I remembered, first, a certain room in Newnham which I once saw. It was not much larger than this, and it was very daintily furnished. I hope the girl it belonged to was pretty, and that she got her First Class. Cleverness, you know, and beauty, and taste ought always to go together. Next I read a certain chapter about hermits in "Hypatia." After that, I recalled the fittings of a cabin in a little yacht wherein I sailed last year. And then I read a few chapters of "Robinson Crusoe" and of "Philip Quarles." This carried me a long way, and then with just a page or two of Xavier de Maistre and the help of a book on æsthetic furniture, and one

visit to an artistic upholsterer, I managed to furnish your room for you. This is the result.'

They were both extremely grave and serious, because, now that the thing was begun, it looked horribly beset with perils of all kinds. Perhaps this was the reason why Claude talked with a certain show of frivolity.

'Thank you, Claude.' I do not know why, but her eyes became dim.

'Here is your tea service,' Claude began, pointing out the things as if it was a private museum—in fact he was almost as proud of them as if he was a collector—'four cups in blue, and here is your dinner service. I hope you will like the pattern.' They were ranged on the shelves of a small ebony cabinet fixed on the wall over a chest of drawers: 'Here are your book-shelves; the leaves of the table can be let down so as to give you more room. thought you would like candles better than oil, and I hope you will find this little reading-lamp useful. The view from the window is not extensive and not very nice, but I have put a box outside with mignonette in it. I know the easy-chair is comfortable, because I tried it myself. You will have no other looking-glass

than this mirror over the mantel-shelf. See, here is Violet's photograph, and here is mine. The old fireplace was truly disgraceful. I believe that the previous occupant, poor thing, in her extremity, had eaten two of the bars. So I put in this. It is pretty, I think, and the tiles are really good. As for stores, you will find some in this cupboard—quite a big cupboard, isn't it? Here are coals, but I fear you will find your coal supply a difficulty. This is your filter, and here are your cooking utensils. Try to think if there is anything I have forgotten, or anything else at all I can do for you. Shall I come every day to sit on the stairs and peel potatoes for you?'

'No, Claude, thank you. And now you had better leave me, or else I am afraid I shall begin to cry. I am sure I shall not want anything more.'

'You are not—not afraid, Valentine?'

'If I were I should not acknowledge it. But go, Claude. To-day is Thursday. Come to see me on Sunday morning—not before. I think I should like to be quite alone until then. If I am in trouble I shall make Melenda help me. Good-bye, Claude. It is a beau-

tiful thing to have a brother who will take so much trouble for one. I am very grateful. Good-bye. Go and stay with Violet this evening.'

When the door was shut and she had wrestled with that inclination to cry—sustaining for a few moments a shameful defeat, but she rallied—she sat on her bed and looked about her. The room was certainly very small, yet Claude had made it pretty. The walls were of plaster, newly scraped and repaired and stained, and made quite clean; the ceiling was freshly whitewashed; the little green and gold iron bed was covered with a counterpane of pleasing design; two candlesticks stood on the mantel-shelf, and her lamp was on a three-cornered bracket; an embroidered cloth lay on the table, and there were flowers in a vase; there were pretty curtains to the window, of a soft stuff, pleasant to look upon and to touch, and on the floor lay a rug large enough to serve for carpet. There were only three chairs, one of them an easy chair, low, long, deep, and luxurious, in which one might meditate and rest; and the fireplace was pretty, with its tiles and its brass

fender. In the cupboard she found a loaf of bread, butter, a small ham—already boiled—sugar, tea, coffee, and other things; and on the lowest shelf she discovered, and handled with some curiosity, a saucepan, a pot, a frying-pan, a gridiron, and a Dutch oven; would she have to learn the use of all these things? Besides the mirror over the mantel-shelf, Claude had hung up some fans and feathers and a little picture or two. It really *is* a beautiful thing to have a brother who will work for one. What servant—what army of servants—would have made this place so dainty and so pretty? It is a thing, in fact, which cannot be done to order. And the discovery of so small a detail as a box of matches almost brought her to tears a second time. Claude had remembered the matches! Everybody knows the dreadful carelessness of even good housemaids in the matter of matches.

It certainly seemed as if life was going to become, for a time, a much more simple thing than she had been accustomed to consider it. Here she was, in a little room only twelve feet square, surrounded by everything necessary for

existence, with food and drink, shelter, bed, and clothes to wear. What else can a reasonable being want? In Park Lane they had one room for sleeping, one for eating, a third for study, and a fourth for society. The things to eat were not kept in the sleeping-room, nor were the clothes kept in the eating-room, nor was the cooking done in the room reserved for society—fancy Violet 'gridling' a steak in the large drawing-room! Nor was the coal cellar kept in a bedroom, nor was the pantry confused with the library. Yet here were bedroom, dining-room, drawing-room, library, kitchen, scullery, and coal cellar all combined in one small chamber which Claude had made pretty for its three months' tenant.

She sat on the bed for a long time, thinking. Now that the thing was really begun, and she was alone in the house, and going to remain alone for a long time, she felt more than a little afraid. Suppose that some one were to walk in at the open door and visit her, unasked. The house door was open all day, and there was nothing to prevent any curious or impertinent person—at the thought she sprang to her feet and examined her door.

Oh, prudent Claude! He had thought of this too. He had provided the door with a chain, a bolt, a lock, and a wooden bar, which could be dropped into strong iron stanchions, capable of withstanding any ordinary pressure. And besides these fortifications, she had Melenda close at hand, though as yet Melenda was ignorant of her arrival. If anything happened she could call out for her. Surely Melenda was fierce enough and brave enough for any emergency whatever.

Quite alone! There are many men who all their lives spend more than half the twenty-four hours in loneliness absolute, yet do not seem to mind it. Who can be more lonely, for instance, than the tenant of chambers, who sits in them all day working or waiting for clients, and all night reading or sleeping; and perhaps when the clerks are gone, the only man left on the ghostly staircase? Yet men live on in this solitary way, sometimes without even a club, and never complain of loneliness, and never seem afraid of ghosts. Not long ago there was a man who died at the ripe age of eighty-one, and had lived for thirty years all alone in a country house, seeing no one, and

not even admitting a woman to clean up, and not taking the trouble to clean up the place himself, so that when he died the female population to a woman made haste to visit the house in order to gaze and gloat upon the dust. Yet he was quite happy. Men, in fact, live alone from the time when they leave school to the time when they marry, which is very often a long spell. They have their little distractions—their clubs, their friends, their theatres; but they spend most of their evenings and all their nights alone in their rooms. Women, on the other hand, seldom live alone: young women never. They are accustomed to go about together, to sit, work, and even study together. Valentine had never been separated for a single day from Violet. She had never been without the sense of protection with which young ladies are wrapped and clothed as with a suit of armour. Except in her bedroom, which was next to Violet's, she had never once been alone in all her life. And, needless to point out—though this is of minor importance—she had never done anything at all for herself. Now, like Tommy Merton, she was to discover that if she would eat she must

work—that is, she must cook. She got up, therefore, and began to wonder if she could make herself some tea. Again, that most thoughtful youth Claude had remembered everything. The fire was laid, not with sticks —a slow and uncertain method unless you use a whole bundle, which costs a halfpenny, and is never permitted even in the most extravagant household—but with the resinous wheels, which burn fiercely and make a fine fire in two minutes. The kettle, she found, was filled with water; in the cupboard was a caddy full of tea. There was white sugar in the sugar-basin; nobody knew better than Claude that brown sugar was becoming for Polly's position, but he pretended to forget that detail. In the same way he had committed gross incongruities in the French bed, and the pretty lamp with the tinted shade, and the æsthetic table-cover. Then Valentine discovered further, a saucer full of white eggs—not the 'selected' at ten for a shilling—and two or three pots of preserves, besides the bread and the butter already mentioned. There was also a jug of milk. Where, Valentine wondered, would she get her milk for next day? Then, with a

solemn feeling, as if she was setting a light to the sacred Hearth of Vesta, or propitiating the Lares, she struck a match upon the magic box and set the fire-wheel crackling and blazing, and made the coals to burn merrily and to dart forth long tongues of flame, licking the bars and the sides of the kettle, and when the water presently began to sing, Valentine began to feel that she might find happiness even in living alone.

While the kettle was singing, and before it boiled over, Valentine looked out of window over her box of mignonette. The back of Ivy Lane at this point 'gives' partly upon Hammond Square, which now consists of a Board School, with its asphalted pavement, where the children were playing. The great red-brick building of the school dominates the mean houses in which it is placed, much as a mediæval castle used to dominate the village which clustered round it. There is, however, an important distinction. The castle was on an eminence above the village; the Board School is on the same level with it. This fact alone is sufficient to prevent the Board School-master from becoming a proud baron. On

the west of Hammond Square is the back of Hemsworth Street, and between the 'backs' there are small yards which were once meant to be little gardens, but are innocent of flowers, though here and there stands a solitary tree, the melancholy survivor of the orchard, with blackened trunk and grimy branches. The yards are now used for the drying of linen, and there is always a great deal hanging out on fine days, so that at first one feels that Hoxton must be a very clean place, and therefore not far from the Kingdom of Heaven. But that is only a first suspicion, and not a first impression, for the wish is father to the thought. A closer inspection shows grubby yards, filled with rubbish, brickbats, and everywhere cats, a most wonderful collection of cats, sunning themselves upon the walls; and all sleek, all well-fed, fat, and good-tempered, and probably quite certain that they are living in a picturesque country, and in the highest society, among ladies and gentlemen of the greatest refinement. Then Valentine looked across the space between the two 'backs,' and as she had eyes stronger than most she could see through the open windows opposite, and could catch a

glimpse of interiors which filled her soul with pity. One certainly ought, under all conditions of life, and at any juncture, to be clean and to live in clean rooms; but this commandment has never been written. It is not, therefore, felt to be so binding as the others, and in time of pressure and trouble the enthusiasm for cleanliness is apt to decline. Few people have the heart to clean up when there is no work to be done, and no money to spend, and nothing to drink. And Valentine saw another thing; not only were there backyards and grimy windows, but there were courts at the back with houses even smaller than the one in which she sat. In fact, some of them were only two-roomed houses, and these houses added their little backyards and their dirt, and, as she was to discover later on, their noise as well.

Valentine left her window. And then she made her tea and drank a cup, with a curious sense of unreality, because Violet's voice should have been in her ears; and it was incongruous, and like a nightmare, that she should make her own tea for herself alone in her bedroom.

After her tea she sat reading until about half-past eight, when the sun had set and the twilight was upon the ugly backs and grubby yards. And then, but with misgivings, she left her room and timidly knocked at Melenda's door.

The girls had just finished work for the day. Melenda was folding it up; Lotty was arranging herself for rest. Lizzie was stretching out her arms as Ixion might have done when they took him down from his wheel and told him he might knock off for the night.

'I have come back,' said Valentine.

'Oh,' replied Melenda, pretending not to be astonished. But the other two gasped.

'You said that Polly might come if she came by herself. Are you glad to see me again now that I am alone?'

'Not likely,' said Melenda shortly.

'I have come to stay here. I have got a room in this very house.'

Lizzie opened her great eyes wider, but Melenda, who was not going to be surprised by anything, only sniffed.

'What have you done that for?'

'To be near you. We are sisters, Melenda.'

'The other day you didn't know which was which. As if a girl could get lost. And how are you going to live? There's no service about here. There's a young girl wanted at the public-house, I believe, but you must be pretty low down if you'd demean yourself by going there. I wouldn't, no more would Lizzie. Have you saved your money?'

'I have some money for a time.' This was delicate ground, and she hastened to get over it quickly. 'Claude furnished my room for me. Let me show it to you.'

'Well,' said Melenda ungraciously, 'I can't help it, if you choose to come. You won't stay long, I suppose. Let's see the room.'

They all three went with her, impelled by the strongest of feminine instincts.

Valentine had now pulled down the blind, drawn her curtains, and lit the pretty reading lamp with its coloured shade.

'Oh—h!' the girls gasped. They had never before seen a pretty room, and the prettiness of this room took their breath away. Even Melenda, who had been prepared to admire nothing, was taken by surprise. They went round, looking at and examining every-

thing, the easy-chair, the fireplace, the book-shelves, the table, and the pictures.

'See,' said Valentine, 'here is my cupboard with my stores. We will have dinner together if you will. Here are my books; we will read together every day if you like. Here is my work-box. I will work with you if you will let me. I can work very well.'

'What's gone of all your fine clothes and your gold chain?' asked Lizzie, staring at the plain brown frock.

'I have not brought them here. I have only this frock and an ulster like your own.' Melenda laughed scornfully.

'It's nothing but play-acting, Polly. Lord! nobody would take you for a workgirl—you and your ulster! Why, it isn't ragged, and your elbows don't stick through. And where's your fringe? And you've got a collar and cuffs: and look at your fingers! I'll just tell you what you look like—nothing but a lady's-maid out o' work.' She made this comparison in tones so contemptuous that for a while Valentine was confounded.

'I will pass for a lady's-maid, then,' she replied, when she had recovered a little. 'You won't be unkind, Melenda, will you?

Melenda was examining the photographs on the mantelshelf. 'Here's Claude,' she said; 'he looks a swell, don't he? What's he got a square thing on his head for? And why does he wear a black gown?'

'Claude is a great scholar. He is photographed in the cap and gown that scholars wear at the University. That is Violet, my sister.'

'That's the other one,' said Melenda; 'her that cried. She won't come again, because I threatened to pull her hair off.' She laughed grimly. 'Looks a bit like Joe, somehow. But you look a bit like Claude.'

'Will you let me sit with you, and go in and out without disturbing you, Melenda?'

It was Lotty who replied for her.

'Don't ask Melenda, else you'll only put her back up, and she'll answer hasty. Come without asking.'

'We're workgirls,' Melenda added, not a bit offended by this allusion to her temper, 'and we've got our work to do, and we can't be chattering. If you won't make Liz chatter and lose her time, you may come. Lotty likes you, if I don't.'

Valentine turned grateful eyes to the thin hollow-chested girl with the weak back.

'So Claude took and furnished the room for you, did he?' said Melenda. 'Where'd he get the money to spend on it? I suppose you don't mind being beholden to him, do you?'

'Not a bit,' said Valentine; 'I am glad to be grateful to Claude.'

'Humph,' Melenda grunted. 'He shan't help me if I know it. And he came here and took the room and all—they told me a swell had been about the place—without seeing me or telling me anything about it. He's in a rage with me, I suppose, 'cos I let out the other day.'

'You called him names when he came. But he is not in a rage with you at all, I am sure.'

'He pretended not to mind. Why didn't he call back then, instead of standing and looking as if he was looking through one with a bradawl? Many a man would have knocked a girl down for less.'

'Claude does not knock women down.'

Melenda changed the subject.

'How are you going to cook,' she asked, 'with a finicking stove like that? The water's

laid on behind, one cask for every two houses. You'll have to do all your own work yourself. Lotty 'll tell you how to manage, if you'll ask her—she knows how to cook beautiful. You should taste her beef and onions. You can pay her any way you like. Her back's awful bad sometimes — sit down on Polly's bed, Lotty—and she never flies in a rage like I should do if my back was bad. And she isn't so proud as she ought to be. She'll take things from you.'

Melenda spoke with the superiority of health and strength, but Lotty hung her head. Pride, independence, and freedom were fine things for girls with strong backs, but she was permitted to be beholden to people. It was a permission of which the poor girl could rarely avail herself. As for Liz, she gazed about her with great eyes and open mouth. The room looked to her like a little garden of Eden, or at least like Eve's Petit Trianon, if she had one in that park.

'I am going to have some supper,' said Valentine, pleased to have got on so well. 'Here is a ham that Claude gave me, and bread and butter, and we will light the fire

again and make some cocoa, if you would like to have some.'

The ham looked splendid when Valentine put it on the table. All three girls became instantly conscious of a hollow and yearning sensation. Lotty turned quite white, and Lizzie clutched the back of a chair, but Melenda flew into a rage because of the temptation.

'I won't eat your ham!' she cried; 'I won't eat any of your ham! Do you hear? I won't take anything from you. Lotty may, because she's weak in her back. Lizzie ought to be ashamed — she ought — if she eats any! I shan't. I shall go out for a walk. I shall take and walk up and down Hoxton Street till I'm tired. There! They're a nice lot in Hoxton Street of a night! You'll be proud of your sister, won't you? If I'd got any money to spend I'd go to the Brittannier or else to the Variety Music Hall, and I shan't get home before midnight likely.'

She made these announcements with defiance. They illustrated at once her independence, her freedom of action, and her contempt of criticism. With the light of wrath in her

eyes, with her parted lips, and the lamp-light softening the effect of that lump of hair on her forehead, Melenda looked her very best. She might have been painted as an actress in a great part. But she ought to have been painted in a rage. She banged out of the room, and they heard her run downstairs. Then she ran back again.

'If you sit with Lotty,' she said, while all trembled, 'or if Lotty sits with you, prop her up and make her comfortable. Don't go to say that I don't look after Lotty. Don't dare to say that, or I'll serve you——'

Her eyes fell upon the photograph of Claude in the square cap and the gown, who seemed to be asking her, with grave face, if this language was becoming to a girl who respected herself. She stopped, turned, and fled.

'And now,' said Valentine, 'we will have some supper.'

'Do ladies all live in beautiful rooms like this?' asked Lizzie, when that meal of fragrant cocoa with ham and bread and butter, served on a snow-white cloth, was finished and the things put away. She had not spoken a word, but

looked about her all the time curiously and wonderingly. 'Do they all live like this?'

'I suppose so,' said Valentine. 'This is a poor little room, but Claude has made it pretty.'

'And do they all have as much ham and bread and butter as they like?'

'Yes, I believe they do.'

Liz asked no more questions. But presently she rose and put on her ulster and hat, and went out without a word. She was no longer hungry: the sight of the pretty room and the dainty supper filled her with physical content and ease, and with a vague yearning that it might be always like this, and in her mind there echoed certain words which she could not repeat to Lotty and Melenda. 'You ought to be a lady,' said these words. 'You ought to live like a lady in pretty rooms, and be dressed beautifully, and have nothing to do but to please some one with your lovely eyes.' Why, she knew now what it was to be a lady and to live in a pretty room. She had never known before, poor Liz. And it seemed an altogether desirable and a lovely life. She went out into the street thinking how it would

be to have every day such a supper, to sit in such a room, to wear such a pretty frock, and to have, put away somewhere, beautiful dresses and gold chains. 'You ought to be a lady. You ought to live like a lady in pretty rooms, and be dressed beautifully, and have nothing to do but to please some one with your lovely eyes.' Perhaps it was the devil who whispered these words in her ear continually, so that she saw nothing as she walked along the crowded street but the pretty room, with its soft-coloured light, and the sweet face of its owner, and her graceful, gentle ways. 'You ought to be a lady.' If she only could!

When she got home at twelve, Lotty was already asleep. Generally the pain in her back kept her awake. But now she was sleeping. There was light enough for Liz to see her thin pale face upon the pillow. Something—perhaps it was that—touched the girl's heart.

'I won't never leave Lotty,' she murmured, 'not even to be a lady.'

When they were left alone, Valentine made Lotty lie down upon her bed and propped her

up with pillows, and cooled her hot temples with eau de cologne.

'Oh,' said Lotty, 'it's like Melenda; but she never had any scent, poor thing.' She meant that Valentine was as kind and thoughtful for her as her friend Melenda. 'Don't anger her, Miss. She's a good sort if you take her the right way.'

'You mustn't call me Miss. Call me—no, call me Valentine.'

'Oh, but I can't, because you are a young lady. Well, then, Valentine.'

'Are you always left alone in the evening?'

'Yes, always. They must go out after the day's work. I know what you think. The streets are rough. But Melenda won't get into mischief. And she's too proud to go into public-houses and drink with the men, as some girls do. And so's Liz.'

'Melenda said you were not to talk much. Let me talk to you. What shall I tell you?'

'Tell me whatever you like. You've got such a soft voice. I told Melenda you were kind and didn't come to laugh at us, though you are a lady and all.'

'But, my dear, ladies don't laugh at working girls.'

'Sam says they laugh at all poor people.'

'Sam says what is horribly untrue then. Do not believe Sam.'

'He was here the other day. We'd been out of work for three days, and Liz she'd gone to look for it at one house and Melenda at another, and I was lying down. Sam stamped and swore—he's dreadful when his blood's up—and he said, "What do they care if all the workgirls in London starve? They're worse than the men who call themselves gentlemen, for they have listened to the workmen. They are the cruellest people in the world, and the hardest hearted." That's what Sam said.'

'Who are?' interrupted Valentine.

'The women who call themselves ladies. That's what Sam said; and then he swore again, and then he went on to say that if there had been half the tyranny with the men as there is with the women, all England would have rose. And the ladies know it, he said, and they've been told day after day; the papers, he says, are full of it; they are taught

about it in their poetry books, but they do nothing; and Sam says they never will do nothing, so long as they can get their pretty things cheap, but laugh at us while we work and starve. Not that we really do starve, you know, because there's always somehow been bread and cold tea, but sometimes there's nothing more. That's what Sam says.'

'It isn't true, Lotty,' said Valentine. But she felt guilty, not of laughing, but of apathy. 'Help me to be neither cruel nor hard-hearted, my dear.'

Then she was silent, thinking, and Lotty lay resting.

Presently Valentine said:

'I will tell you a story, a story about myself, Lotty. Once upon a time, there was a poor widow woman, who had a large family to keep, and took in washing, but she had to work very hard. One day there came to see her a great lady who had known her a long time before, and she said to the poor woman, "Give me your little girl, your youngest. I will take her away and bring her up with my own child and care for her. Some day you shall see her again." The poor woman knew that her

daughter would be kindly kept, and so she let her go, and for a long time saw the child no more, because she was being taught all kinds of things, and among others to be a young lady. This is not at all easy for any girl to learn, Lotty, because it means all kinds of things besides the wearing of fine clothes; among others it means always thinking the best things and doing the noblest things, so that I am afraid that girl got but a very little way. However, after nineteen years, she went back with her benefactor's daughter to see her mother and her brothers and her sister, who was a workgirl. But they were not at all pleased to see her, and her sister made herself hard and proud, and could not bear to be helped out of the great lady's treasures, and said very cruel things and drove her away. Then the girl put off her finery and came to live in the same house with her working sister. She came to learn how workgirls live, and what they think, and what they want, and she hoped to make her sister love her. That is all the story, Lotty.'

'It isn't finished. And what does she want Melenda to love her for?'

'Oh, Lotty, love makes people happy. Suppose you had neither Melenda nor Lizzie.'

'If I hadn't got Melenda,' said the girl, 'I should wish I was dead and buried.'

CHAPTER II.

THE CITY OF HOGSDEN.

It is best to drop a veil over the first few hours of that first night in Ivy Lane. It is sufficient to explain that the evening between eight and twelve is the liveliest time of the day for Ivy Lane; that the Adelaide Tavern then does its briskest business, that the street is fullest, the voices loudest, the children most shrill, the women most loquacious, and the 'language' most pronounced. On this evening there was a drunken man in one of the courts somewhere behind the house, and somebody of one sex was beating somebody of the other sex, with oaths on the one hand and screams on the other. Suppose some step should come up the stair, and some unknown person should knock at her door. Suppose the house was quite empty except for herself. Yet Ivy Lane is not the haunt of criminals; its population is made up of honest working men and women, whose

principal fault is that they have not yet learned the virtue of self-restraint.

Towards midnight the noise began to subside, and the street grew rapidly quieter. Presently Valentine fell asleep, though with misgivings in her dreams, which would have become dreadful nightmares had she but known that Lizzie, the latest to return, had left the street door wide open for the night.

When she awoke the morning was already well advanced, which was perceptible even to a new arrival by reason of the stillness. For at nine the men are at work, and the women are 'doing up' in their rooms, and the children are at school. A Sabbath calm had fallen upon Ivy Lane and upon its courts to north and south. Valentine lay half asleep, thinking that she was at home, and wondering lazily why her maid did not come to call her. Suddenly she remembered where she was; she sprang to her feet, pulled back the curtains and looked abroad from behind the blind. The sun was high in the heavens, pouring down gracious floods of warmth and heat upon the linen in the yards; in the beginning of all things the sun was created on purpose to

dry the linen; there seemed to be a universal calm and restfulness; from the Board School at the back there was heard a soothing murmurous sound of many voices, and from Hoxton Street the distant roll of carts and the shouts of costers. Valentine was the latest riser that morning in Ivy Lane, except perhaps those who were lying down never to get up again any more, and those who were in temporary retirement with fevers and the like.

Thankful and somewhat surprised that the night had passed with no worse adventure than that of the midnight clamour, she proceeded to make her own breakfast. She hesitated, considering whether it would be well to invite her friends in the next room. But the fear of Melenda decided her to breakfast alone. There was no milk, and she did not know where to get any more; there was no water, and she had to go downstairs and fill her own kettle, and to lay her fire, and to brush up the stove, as well as to make her own bed and dust the room. These things are not hardships exactly, but it seems more fitting somehow that other people should do them for one. What the other people think

about it has never yet been made known to the world.

When Robinson Crusoe had quite made up his mind that there were neither cannibals nor wild beasts upon his island, the first thing he did was to go exploring. I have often thought how much more interesting his story might have been had there been one, only one, just one man-eating tiger on the island, so that he could have stalked Robinson and failed to catch him, while Robinson could have shot at him from places of ambush and failed to hit him; and so both the tiger and the man would have had a lively time, and the reader would have been kept awake. No doubt in Hoxton there is more than one man-eater, but Valentine never saw any at all, though she was at first horribly afraid of meeting one, and wondered what she should do if that should happen. She began that very morning, and daily continued, the exploration of Hoxton. There was indeed so much to see and to learn that she never got outside the narrow precincts of that town during the whole of her three months' stay in it.

The city of Hogsden, or Hoxton, as it is

now the fashion to write the name, is not to outward view a romantic or a picturesque city; none of its friends have claimed for it that kind of distinction. It does not stand upon a rock overhanging a river, like Quebec or Durham; it is placed, on the other hand, upon a level plain beside a canal; it is not a city of gardens, like Damascus; nor a city of palaces, like Venice; nor a mediæval city with old walls, like Avignon; it has no gardens left at all, except the two black patches of its two little squares; yet once it was all garden. It has no palaces, though once it had great houses; it has few associations or memories of the past, because as a city it is not yet more than a hundred years old. There is nothing at all beautiful or picturesque or romantic in it. There is only the romance of every life in it—there are sixty thousand lives in Hoxton, and every one with its own story to tell; sixty thousand romances beginning, proceeding, and ending; the stories of those who are old and of those who are growing old; of those who are children and those who are young men and maidens; of those who think of love and those who remember the days when they thought

about it; of those who desire love to come and those who mourn for love departed. What more, in Heaven's name, is wanted to make romance?

It is a city whose boundaries are as well marked as if it were surrounded, like York and Canterbury, with a high wall, for it has a canal to west and north, with St. Luke's Workhouse standing in the angle like the Tower of London or the citadel of breezy Troy. On the east side lies the broad highway of the Shoreditch or Kingsland Road, which parteth Hoxton from her sisters, Haggerston and Bethnal Green. The southern march is by the City Road and Old Street. It thus stands compact and complete; it is a city lying secluded and quiet, like the city of Laish. Travellers come not within its borders; few, even among Londoners, wot of it; foreigners never hear of it; to Americans it has no associations, and they never visit its streets; it is content with one line of omnibuses to connect it with the outer world; there is no cabstand in its precincts; it has no railway station. The newspapers do not expect to find anything of interest in Hoxton, and penny-a-

liners never visit it for the sake of paragraphs. Its people are quiet and industrious; folk who ask for nothing but steady work and fair wages, and have a rooted aversion to any public appearance, whether in a police court, or a county court, or on a political platform, or at a Gospel revival, just as formerly they disliked appearing publicly in pillory or stocks. There is no habitual criminal class in Hoxton, unless the recent destruction of rookeries in Whitecross Street has driven a few of the rogues to find temporary refuge, before 'chivvying' begins again, in the southern streets of this city. As regards civic monuments and public buildings, there are eight churches and quite as many chapels, and some of the inhabitants have been known to visit these architectural marvels on the Sunday morning. There is the great theatre called the 'Brittannier 'Oxton,' and the smaller or less known Theatre of Varieties in Pitfield Street; there is a splendid great school for boys and girls, where were once the country almshouses of the Haberdashers; there are the Fullers' Almshouses; there are four Board Schools to beautify four of its streets; there are the famous iron

portals of Mary Street; and there are two bridges over the canal. There are no rich residents, no carriages, no footmen; none of the flaunting luxuries which are described by travellers as existing at the West End. The houses are small and mostly low; there is no doubt at all that everybody is quite poor, and that for six days in the week, all the year round, everybody works for ten hours a day at least, and sometimes more. Yet the place has a cheerful look. There may be misery, but it is not apparent; the people in the streets seem well-fed, and are as rosy as London smoke and fog will allow. In the daytime the pavements of the side streets are mostly deserted, and there are not many who lounge, hands in pocket, at the corner of the street. Among the rows of small houses which speak of decent poverty there are not wanting one or two of the old houses, survivors of the time when they stood among green fields and orchards, the country residences of great merchants. The two squares in which they used to live are still left. And the streets are mostly broad, because there was plenty of room when they were built; two or three of them can even

boast a double width of pavement, supposed by some, imperfectly acquainted with London, to be a luxury known only in Whitechapel Waste. And lastly, the streets, though certainly not remarkable for originality of design, are at least not all built after the same pattern, as may be seen in Bromley beyond Bow.

This was Valentine's first impression of the quarter, a first impression which might be modified but would never be quite destroyed. Since Hoxton possesses some eighty streets, it must not be supposed that she went into every one of them in a single morning. In fact she walked down Pitfield Street into Old Street, and up Hoxton Street into Hyde Road and Whitmore Street, and so over the bridge which leads to Kingsland, and back by way of St. John's Road to Ivy Lane—the whole with lingering step and occasional excursions into side streets which seemed to promise something strange or curious. Not this morning only, but many successive mornings, she took this walk among streets where the people live.

She discovered, if one may anticipate, in these daily wanderings, many remarkable things and some remarkable people. Hoxton,

by the circumstances of its trade, is calculated to develop character in a manner impossible for some other quarters, such as Kentish Town and Camden Town, which are cities of the little clerk. Hoxton, however, is the city of the smaller industries and the lesser ingenuities. Here they make the little things necessary to civilised life, such things as the Andamanese and the Soudanese can do very well without, but which we must have. Thus, they are workers in mosaic and in lacquer: they are buhl cutters, fret cutters, marqueterie cutters, razor grinders, glass bevellers, and they finish brushes. Some of them are hair hands, some pan hands, and some drawing hands, in the brush trade; they stitch buff, at least they say so, but it may be a dark and allegorical announcement, because one hath never heard of buff, nor knoweth what its nature may be; they gild envelopes, they emboss on steel; as regards the women they are all classified as 'hands'—nothing else is wanted by a woman, not intelligence, or invention, or grace, or beauty, or sweetness—nothing but hands. There are bead hands, feather hands—who are subdivided into curling hands, improvers,

mounters, and aigrette hands — mantle hands, skirt hands, bodice hands, mob-cap hands, children's pinafore hands, cape-lining hands, bead hands, butterfly hands, and tie hands, who are again divided into flat-work hands, back stitchers, band hands, slip stitchers, and front hands; they are black borderers, braiders, and a hundred others. Besides all this, these industrious people make towel-horses, upholstery for perambulators, fancy boxes, lace paper for valentines, picture frames, paint brushes, trunk furniture, leather bags, scales, marking ink, trimmings, pipe clay, show cases, instrument cases, looking-glass backs, frillings and rush-wicks; they carve pianos, dress collars, and work in horn; they make fittings for public-houses; they dye cotton; they deal in grindery and they melt tallow; there linger still in Hoxton one or two of those almost extinct medicine men called herbalists. Lastly, in the manufacture of annatto they are said to have no equal.

These things Valentine did not find out in a single day, but in many. At first she wandered just as one wanders on a first visit to a foreign city, getting lost and then finding her way

again, looking into all the shops, reading the names and the trade announcements and watching the people. And at first she was afraid; but as day after day passed and no one molested her she grew more confident.

Perhaps the least desirable of all the streets is the very one in which she had to live. Ivy Lane, by some called Ivy Street, is vexed by certain courts, one of which was commanded by Valentine's window; they are inhabited by the baser sort; perhaps their presence gives a bad name to the street just as it materially increases the evening noise. Certainly Ivy Lane is not so clean as some of the Hoxton streets; its windows are unwashed; its doors want washing and painting. Yet it has both its chapel and its public-house. The former is small and plain in appearance, with a neat little pediment, a door in the middle, and a window on either side. The doctrine preached in it every Sunday evening is remarkable for purity. As for the public-house, very likely its beer is equally remarkable and for the same reason. But Valentine never tasted either. There are also in the street two chandlers' shops, two second-hand clothes shops, one of them filled

with women's dresses, and a carver in wood. Is not that a typical English street in which Religion, Drink, Food, Art, Labour, and Trade all find a place?

It was nearly one o'clock when Valentine returned to her lodgings. She had begun to see Hoxton. There seemed little in the place that was very depressing. A whole city at work is rather cheerful than otherwise. To be sure she had not been within the houses and she knew nothing of the interiors, which are more important from the human point of view than the outside. Very likely clergymen, district visitors, Bible women, and the general practitioners, know enough about the place to depress the most sanguine. And when she came back, she remembered all the girls who, like Melenda and Lotty and Lizzie, must be sitting within those walls stitching all day long for less than a penny an hour, and her heart fell. The cheerfulness goes out of honest labour when one learns that it only means a single penny an hour.

As she climbed the steep, narrow stair, she saw, through the half-open door of the ground-floor back, a strange and curious thing. The

occupant, an old woman, whom she had not seen before, was solemnly engaged in dancing by herself, to an imaginary audience. She shook her petticoats, pirouetted, executed unheard-of steps, capered and postured, with all the agility and some of the grace of a youthful *danseuse*. Valentine was thinking of the sewing-women; the thing passed before her eyes as she went up the stair; she saw it but took no heed; nor was it till afterwards that she remembered it and wondered what this might mean.

She opened Melenda's door and looked in. Something must have gone wrong. On Melenda's brow, or where her brow should have been but for the fringe, there rested a cloud: it was a cloud much bigger than a man's hand—in fact, it treated her as if she had been a goddess of the good old time, and enwrapped and enfolded her completely, so that she was veiled in cloud. The other two seemed cowed. Lotty, sitting on the bed, hardly dared to raise her eyes. Lizzie turned her head furtively, but without so much as a smile or even a look of recognition. Both

waited for Melenda to speak and went on with their work, but self-consciously.

In fact, there had been a discussion carried on with great animation by all three, mostly talking together. This method of controversy is lively, but hardly calculated to settle the points at issue. Lotty's part in it was chiefly one of remonstrance and entreaty. She had been guilty of eating some of Valentine's ham for supper, and of drinking a cup of cocoa. Perhaps it was the unusual sense of repletion which had given her a good and almost painless night, though Melenda's attitude in the morning filled her with a sense of guilt. Lizzie, on the other hand, who had no excuse, except that of hunger, for selling her independence for a plate of ham, actually gloried in the action, and proclaimed her readiness to do it again if invited, and laughed at Melenda for not taking all she could get. There were rebellious questionings, scoffs, and doubts—all put down to that concert, and the talk with the gentleman afterwards. Lizzie never used to show such spirit before she was tempted. Many bear with pride the ills for which there

seems no cure; but when a way is shown, alas! poor Pride! Melenda tried argument, with reduction to first principle, dogmatic assertion, and quotations from the Opinions and Maxims of the Philosopher Sam. Valentine and her ham were only the text. The Independence of Woman was the true theme.

'Do you want anything?' asked Melenda, with an ominous glitter in her eye.

'No,' said Valentine, 'I only came——'

'Then you can go away,' said her sister; 'we're working girls, and we've got our bread to earn. We haven't taken money off of rich ladies for nothing. You can go away and eat up all the rest of the ham—you and your ham!'

'But, Melenda——'

'Go away, I say. We've got our work to do. Don't come wasting time. And Lizzie eating such a lot of supper that she couldn't be waked this morning. Go away.'

Valentine meekly obeyed and closed the door. So far she had made very little way with her sister. But she caught the eyes of Lotty as she went out. They said as plainly as eyes could speak, 'Forgive her, and don't give up trying.'

'Oh, Melenda!' said the possessor of these eyes reproachfully.

Melenda sniffed.

'As for me,' said Lizzie, 'if I had the good luck to have such a sister I wouldn't turn her out of the room. I'd have better manners.'

'You'd beg and borrow all she had to give, I suppose, and call that good manners?'

'I'd take anything she wanted to give, and I'd behave pretty to her.'

'She ain't your sister, then. And I'm old enough to know how to behave.'

This closed the discussion. And all there was for the girls' dinner—while, as Lizzie reflected, plenty reigned in the next room—was a thick slice each of bread and butter.

At Hoxton, I am told, nobody at all, not even any of the eight vicars or the seven curates—but this may be incorrect—ever thinks of dining late. Dinner at half-past seven is not possible; one ceases to think of such a thing the moment one begins to breathe the air of Hoxton. Valentine, therefore, at one o'clock, began naturally to consider the subject of dinner instead of luncheon. She had to look at it from quite a new point of

view—namely, to think how it was to be provided, and how she was to use those beautiful instruments provided for her. To all right-minded and cultivated persons dinner necessarily involves potatoes; you cannot dine without potatoes. Other things may be neglected. Pickles, pudding, fish, soup, may be considered as non-essentials, but not potatoes. I have, it is true, seen a ploughboy sitting under a hedge making what he called his dinner with a lump of bacon fat, a great hunch of bread, and a clasp-knife, but he thought of potatoes; and I have seen a navvy making what he called his dinner with a great piece of underdone beef cut thick, as they love it, those others, and half a loaf. But all this is merely stoking or taking in coal. Both navvy and ploughboy know very well that without potatoes there can be no dinner. There must be potatoes. Valentine had the remains of her ham and part of yesterday's loaf, but she had no potatoes. She spread her cloth, laid out these viands, which looked very much like luncheon so far as they went. What about potatoes? If she wanted them she would have to buy them. Where should she go in

search of potatoes? And how was she to buy them? Do they sell potatoes by the dozen, like eggs, or by the peck, like peas, or by the pound, like cherries, or by the pint, like beer, or singly, like peaches? And how do you carry them home? Claude had forgotten one thing. He thought you could live in Hoxton without a basket for marketing. She had, it is true, an apron, but it was not one of those aprons which are designed for the carriage of things like potatoes.

Again, even if she could get over that difficulty she would have to fill her saucepan with water, for which purpose she would have to go downstairs and fetch some from the cistern, and that old woman below, who danced all by herself, might be looking out of window, and she might make remarks. And she would have to light the fire again. And lastly, if she had got her potatoes and had washed and peeled them and had put them in the pot, how long should they boil? Christmas plum-puddings, she had read somewhere, are boiled for several days and several nights continuously. But in no book had she ever read the length of time required to bring out the full mealiness of a

potato. And then, when she had boiled her potatoes and eaten them, she would have all the trouble of clearing everything away and washing up. Truly, as has been already observed, certain things ought to be done for one.

She felt that she could not take all this trouble, at least for that day. To-morrow, perhaps, but not to-day. She would be contented for once with a simple luncheon. She therefore cut some ham and made some sandwiches. When she had eaten these and would have poured out a glass of water, she found that her filter was empty, and the look of the outside of the cistern below did not speak well for its contents. Besides, she did not want to go downstairs. So, like Melenda and the girls in the other room, she contented herself with some cold tea remaining from breakfast, and then pretended, like the navvy and the ploughboy, that she had made her dinner. Thus easy is it to take the downward step, so narrow is the interval between civilisation—of which a modern dinner is by many considered the highest form of expression, and barbarism—in which there is no dinner, so brief is the space which separates us—I mean ourselves, gentle

reader, of the highest culture attainable—from the folk of Ivy Lane.

Consider, however, the time which must be spent every day, by one who lives alone, in the mere preparation of meals and in the cleaning up. The first clean up in the morning; the fetching and carrying of water; the second clean up after breakfast; the clean up after dinner; the clean up after tea; more fetching and carrying water; always more cleaning of dishes and drying of dusters. Good Heavens! one used to wonder how the hermits of old managed to pass their days. Why, they were passed, not in holy meditation at all, for which there was no time, but in continually brushing, brooming, sweeping, washing, laying the cloth, taking it off again and putting it away, cleaning the windows, sweeping up the hearth, buying potatoes and cooking them, making the bed, dressing and undressing—the wonder is that these holy men found any time for meditation at all. Certainly they have left behind them few monuments of their life-long thoughts in seclusion. As for those who did any other work, they, like Melenda and her friends, never washed anything at all.

The dinner over, Valentine rested and read a little, and began the daily journal of her exile, passing lightly over her late skirmish with Melenda, and saying nothing—great is the power of the *suppressio veri*—about the absence of potatoes, so that the impression on the mind of anyone who read those journals would be that there had been no difficulty at all as regards the dinner question. Yet she herself remembered that the question would have to be faced again; and, besides, the ham would not last for ever.

About four o'clock she thought she would go to Tottenham by the tram, and visit the almshouse once more and her blind mother.

CHAPTER III.

ON CURLS AND DIMPLES.

I HAVE always thought it a very remarkable coincidence that on the very first day of Valentine's sojourn among this strange people she should have discovered the great Family Secret—that secret which Lady Mildred thought known to no one but her solicitor and herself. Had the discovery been made earlier, the Great Renunciation might never have been undertaken: had it been made later, it would have been prosecuted in a different spirit. Valentine, in short, on this day established her previously doubtful identity. Perhaps it is as well to know for certain who you are as well as what you are. A Homo in the abstract, male or female, cannot be expected to take as much interest in himself, or to care so much about his own views and opinions, as a Homo who knows at least one generation of his descent,

just enough to connect him with the human family. All Philosophy is based upon the sentiment of family as well as individuality. Valentine therefore, after this day, but not before, was capable of constructing a system of Philosophy for herself if she wished. This in itself is an enormous gain.

'I thought you'd come back, Polly,' said the old lady with much gratification. 'I knew you'd come back by yourself when Miss Beatrice had enjoyed her bit o' fun with the pretending and nonsense. Well, we must humour 'em, mustn't we? Rhoder, child, you can go home. Your Aunt Polly-which-is-Marla will make my tea for me to-night. So you go home.' The girl obeyed, glad to be released from the embarrassment of taking her tea with an aunt so very much unlike any other aunts she knew belonging either to herself or to her friends.

'And so you're going to stay here three months, while her ladyship goes abroad or somewhere, are you, Polly? Well now. And with Melenda too! Well, my dear, I don't know what your temper may be, but of course you can't show off before my lady, which is a

blessed thing for a young girl. And how you'll get on with your sister the Lord knows, because Melenda's awful. Is she friendly?'

'Not very friendly, yet. But I hope she will be.'

'She's morning noon and night in a rage. First it's the work, and then it's the wages, and then it's the long hours, and she's always hungry, which makes her snappish. As for that, the last time she came you could count every bone in her body, poor thing.'

Valentine made the tea and cut the bread and butter, while the old lady, pleased to have so good a listener, talked without pause about her children and her grandchildren.

'It's a real pleasure to have you back again, Polly. There's not many pleasures left for a blind old woman. And good-natured and willing with it. Well!' This is an interjection which may mean many things, and stands in turns for patience, resignation, hope, sarcasm, approbation, or even despair. This time it was accompanied by a heartfelt sigh, and stood for prayerful gratitude that so good a daughter had been restored to her. 'They've taught you to make a good cup of tea, my dear,

though I'm afraid you've a heavy hand with the caddy, and to cut bread and butter as it should be cut, though too much butter and the bread too thin for poor folk. I suppose you often do it for Miss Beatrice?'

'Very often,' said Valentine, truthfully.

'And you don't fidget like Rhoder who's always wanting to be off again unless she can sit in a corner and read her book. She's just like your father, Polly, terrible fond of a book.'

'Was my father fond of reading?'

'Yes, my dear. He was, and that's the only good thing he ever was fond of. Never mind him, Polly. Some day, perhaps, I'll tell you all about him, but never to Claude. You can tell your daughter everything. That's the comfort of having girls, though a woman's always fondest of her boys. A son's a son till he gets him a wife, but your daughter's your daughter—as you'll find out some day, my dear—all the days of your life, though Melenda has never been the daughter I wanted.'

'Then, mother, I am all the more pleased to be of use. Now—what can I do next? I've washed up the things and put them away, and tidied the table. You've got a beautiful

geranium in the window, I will cut away the dead leaves. Rhoda ought to do that for you. Or shall I read to you? I'm sure you would like me to read to you sometimes.'

'No, Polly,' replied the old lady, drawing herself up with dignity, 'you shan't do nothing of the kind. I'm feeling very well this summer; I never felt better in my life; nearly all my rheumatics has gone away and I sleep all night, and I haven't said anything that I remember to make you think I required reading. And as for years I'm sixty turned, but the youngest of them all. If I require reading I believe I can make my wants known and send for a clergyman, unless I am took sudden which may happen to anybody, and one ought to be prepared. Perhaps allowance is made for such. No reading, thank you, my dear.'

'I didn't mean religious reading exactly,' Valentine made haste to explain. 'However, let us talk instead, and I will attend to your flowers. Tell me something more about all of us when we were little—Claude and Melenda and me.'

This she said in perfect innocency, and without a thought of what might follow.

'I will, Polly. Well, my dear, you were a fat little thing, with chubby arms and legs and curls all over your forehead, and the most beautiful little laughing face that ever was seen. No wonder my lady fell in love with you at first sight. Oh, my dear, it was a cruel hard thing to part with you, a hard thing it was.'

'Why did you then, mother?'

'It was for your own good, my dear, and her ladyship promised to give you a good bringing up, which she's done, I'm sure. Besides, I couldn't bear to think of that pretty face brought to shame and tears——'

'But why shame and tears, mother?'

'Well, dear, some time or other, p'raps I'll tell you. Not to-night. I can't bear to talk of it nor to think of it. But some day I'll tell you, because you're Polly. But not to Claude. If you went away I thought there'd be one of them safe, for how to save them other blessed innocents I knew not. Oh, it was a great danger, Polly.'

She paused and sighed, and her lips moved in silence.

'The Lord only knows,' she said presently, 'how I got through that time.' She shud-

dered and clasped her hands. 'Ah, my dear, it's a wonderful thing when you're old to remember what you've gone through. If the Lord sends the trouble, He gives the strength to bear it.'

'You were in trouble, were you, mother?' Valentine laid her hand upon the blind woman's cheek. 'Forget it—don't think about it.'

'I won't, my dear. Well, when you went away the house was dull and quiet, because Claude was a grave child always, and Melenda never had your pretty ways.'

'Had I pretty ways? Oh, I'm afraid I have lost them. What a pity to grow up and lose one's pretty ways!'

'And curls all over your head you had.'

'Had I? And now my hair is quite straight.'

'And a dimple in your cheek you had.'

'The dimple is gone too, I am afraid; gone away with the curls and the pretty ways. What becomes of all these things, and where do they go to?'

'Dimples don't go, Polly, but perhaps it doesn't show as it did. Dimples never go. It is on the left cheek, my dear, and it shows

when you laugh. Ah! And you were always laughing.'

Then, for some unknown reason, Valentine started and flushed a rosy red.

'And you had, besides, a little brown mark, a birth mark, on your arm, just above your elbow. You were the only one of all my children with so much as a speck or spot upon their bodies. Clean-skinned and straight-limbed children you were all, and as upright as a lance, except for that little spot on your arm.'

Valentine made no reply, but her cheek was now quite pale, and she felt dizzy and was fain to catch at the back of a chair, because the walls began to go round and the solid earth to quake. This extraordinary terrestrial phenomenon, which was not noticed by any of the daily papers, nor even by the other residents in Lilly's, was entirely caused by the sympathy of the great round globe for Valentine, when by these simple words the old lady revealed the secret of her birth and filled her with strange emotions and troubled the calmness of her brain. Strange that Lady Mildred should never have thought of these little signs and proofs. But mothers, like leopardesses, know

the spots upon their children which cannot be changed any more than the skin of the Ethiopian.

'On your right arm it is, Polly, my dear. Oh, I remember it very well.'

Valentine made no reply.

'Where are you, dearie?' The blind woman stretched out her hands. 'Where are you, Polly?'

'I am here, mother,' she replied, in an altered voice. 'I am here. But the heat of the day—or something—made me giddy. Wait a moment, mother dear. I will be back directly.'

She went out into the open court before the cottages. After all these years of uncertainty, now she knew the truth. There was no longer any doubt.

Suppose that Prince Florestan, just before coming of age, was to discover that he was not the Prince at all, but only the son of Adam the gardener, and that Adam junior, who had always been employed in picking the strawberries, gathering the cherries, choosing the ripe peaches, shelling the peas, and cutting the asparagus for him to eat, was going to change places with him. And suppose Adam junior was

suddenly to learn that he was going to eat up himself all the fruits of the earth as they came in due season, and that the former Prince was to be occupied in cultivating the gardens for him? What would be the feelings of those young men?

Valentine's case was not quite this, because there never was any case quite the same as Valentine's; but it was near it. She always knew that one of the two was Adam the gardener's son, and now she knew which it was. Yet it must remain her secret. Nobody—not Claude, nor Violet, nor the blind old lady, nor Joe—must know it, partly because it was Lady Mildred's own secret and must be kept for her sake; and partly because for three months to come she was to depend upon Claude as upon a brother for protection and advice, and partly because neither this poor old woman nor Melenda must know that she was among them on false pretences.

Some girls on such a discovery would have made the most of the situation. They would have gone away and wandered with dazed eyes among the fields or beside the banks of a silver stream; they would have clasped hands and

ejaculated; they would have thrown themselves in beautiful attitudes upon sofas or in easy-chairs. Most girls would do, I think, exactly what Valentine did. Like the young lady who went on cutting bread and butter, Valentine went back to the cottage and resumed her trimming of the flowers in the window. For in fact, the dimple in the cheek, the curly hair which would not be brushed straight or lie down, the brown mark upon the arm, just below the elbow—not to speak, Valentine thought, of the pretty and caressing ways—all these belonged not to herself at all but—to Violet. Violet therefore was Polly-which-is-Marla and she was Beatrice, and Lady Mildred was her mother, and Melenda was not her sister save in the bonds of womanhood.

This was her discovery.

She was not, then, that interesting creature, the poor girl educated and brought up as a gentlewoman: she was nothing in the world but Beatrice Eldridge, the daughter of a highly respectable country gentleman, and the granddaughter of an earl. She was not a child of the people at all. Her mother was not the poor woman who now sat in darkness; nor, a

more important thing still, was Claude her brother. Something of her pride was torn from her by the discovery. She had made up her mind ever since she had been able to understand at all what the thing meant, that she was the daughter of these humble people. She honestly believed it. She thought that she was returning to her own folk after many years; and now she was with them indeed, but under false pretences. If the old lady in the cottage knew the truth, first she would freeze, then she would fold her hands over her white apron, and then she would stand up like a village school girl, and say, 'Yes, Miss Beatrice, and my humble service to her ladyship.' And Claude, if he knew the truth, would instantly lose his fraternal manner, and could do nothing more for her. Of course Lady Mildred knew that he would regard her as his sister. Why, the position would be intolerable. Melenda, for her part, would be, if possible, more *farouche* than ever; Lizzie would be more shy and reserved; Lotty would be more timid; and as for all the weaker brethren in Ivy Lane, and wherever the bruit and fame of the thing might spread, and as soon as it became known that

there was actually living in their midst a young lady who would in a few weeks be the possessor of much treasure, all their worst qualities would come straight to the front with every possible form of cunning, meanness, greed, and self-seeking.

'Polly, my dearie, what's the matter? Is it the heat again?'

'I am better now, mother.'

'You ain't cross, my dear, because I wouldn't let you read, are you? I'm sure you read beautiful, and you shall read if you like.'

'Cross, mother! That would be a strange thing. No, I do not want to read since you don't want it. Shall I sing to you? I should like you to hear me sing.'

'Why, my dear, I should like that better than reading. And then we can go on talking again. None of the other children ever had a singing voice. None of them ever went about singing as most children do. Their father couldn't sing, though he could play. All his cleverness went into his fingers.'

Violet could not sing. Her voice was of small compass, and she never sang even alone or with Valentine. All her cleverness, like her

father's, went into her fingers. She could play, though not so well as Valentine. She played to amuse herself; but she painted and drew professionally, so to speak.

'I can sing,' said Valentine. 'I will sing you a hymn, mother.'

She hesitated, and then for some fancied appropriateness—I know not what, perhaps it existed only in her imagination—of the place and the time with the *motif* of the hymn, she chose an old Puritan hymn which has now dropped out of use and been forgotten, since the Churches resolved to stifle the sadness of life and to simulate the voice of one who continually rejoices and is not afraid and has neither doubt nor question. This hymn had very little joy in it, save that of a faith, humble and resigned, with an under-current, an unexpressed feeling of sorrow, and even perhaps of humble remonstrance, that things had not been ordered otherwise from the beginning. This hymn begins with the words, 'We've no abiding city here,' and as Valentine sang them the blind old woman joined her hands as one who prays, and the tears gathered in her eyes.

'Oh, Polly,' she cried, 'my own dear Polly!

To think that you should ever come back to your old mother, and to be such a good girl and all! Let me kiss you again, my dear. Melenda never had your pretty ways, poor thing! Some day—not yet—some day I'll tell you all my troubles. But you mustn't never tell Claude—mind that. We mustn't never let Claude know. You and me will keep the secret to ourselves, my dear. Come often. Come whenever you can. Oh, my Polly, you have made me so glad and happy, my dear—so glad and happy. Your voice is like her ladyship's. You've caught that by living with Miss Beatrice. But your ways are all your own—my own little Polly's soft and pretty ways.'

CHAPTER IV.

LOTTY'S ROMANCE.

Valentine went away with a guilty feeling, as if she had peeped into the sealed chamber: or eaten the forbidden fruit: or searched after the unlawful mystery: or inquired of the wise woman. Yet truly it was not her own seeking, but the simplest accident which disclosed the thing. The discovery was premature. Had she been able to choose she would rather not have made it, because the only course now left to her was to go on precisely and exactly as if she had not found it out, and so she would be among them all under false pretences.

When she got home between nine and ten o'clock the market in Hoxton Street was in full swing, and the matrons of Ivy Lane were gathered together in the street, talking in knots; there was a group of men about the doors of

the 'Adelaide,' and a crowd noisily disputing within the bar.

Was it imagination? or had there already come upon Valentine in one short hour, namely, since the Discovery, a subtle change, so that she no longer regarded the people with quite the same sense of relationship? She was no longer their sister in the narrower sense. We are all of us, to be sure, brothers and sisters —the clergyman tells us so every Sunday, kindly coupling himself with the assurance, 'for you and for me, brethren.' But the recognition of this fact produces fruits of affection and charity in comparative scantiness. One may, besides, acknowledge the relationship, and yet be conscious of a certain natural superiority. Perhaps it was only a passing fancy. Yet there must have been some change. She had come to stay with her own individual sister: she could only now stay with the universal sister, and make believe that she was the private sister. And a great mass of miscellaneous thoughts came crowding into her mind too fast and too numerous for comfortable reception.

As for the people, they already knew Valentine, though only just arrived, as the

sister of a work-girl living among them in one of their houses—presumably a shop-girl from her neat dress and respectable appearance, and also apparently 'quiet'—a quality which in Ivy Lane, as elsewhere, commands the highest respect. The women parted right and left to let her pass, and then closed in again and carried on their Parliament with talk as copious and faces as animated as if they had been a Conference of Advanced Women assembled for the purpose of destroying religion and reversing the political power of the sexes. What do they talk about, these feminine Parliaments of the Crossways? Indeed, no man knoweth; if any were to stay his steps and listen, that rash person would probably be treated as an intruder into the mysteries of Bona Dea. One might, it is true, imitate the reprehensible example of Clodius. Foolish persons, ignorant of these Parliaments and of other things, speak of streets such as Ivy Lane as dull and monotonous. How can a hive of humanity ever be dull? There is no monotony where there are, constantly happening, common to all, and talked about by all, sickness and suffering, birth and death, good hap and evil hap, and the wonderful and dra-

matic situations continually worked out upon the stage of the Human Comedy by that mysterious unknown Power, known only to man by one quality, and named accordingly by such as speak of Him as 'The Unexpected.' Not a day but something happens to redeem such a street from the charge of dulness. Only those places are dull where, though the human ant-hill is divided into streets, the human ants come not forth to exchange words with each other, and one man knoweth not his brother, and each by himself selfishly eateth his own cob nuts and giveth his neighbour none, and each alone bitterly endureth his own pain. It is gentility, especially the first beginning of it, which is dull, when people separate from their fellows and refuse to partake with them of the sacrament of sympathy, whereof quiet conversation is the outward and visible sign. Kingsland, for instance, is dull, and Shepherd's Bush is dull, and Camden Town is inexpressibly dull. The man who once proposed a Palace of Delight for Whitechapel, forgot that it was ever so much more needed in Camden Town.

Now, as Valentine passed through the open doorway, a man who was standing within

stepped aside to make room for her and took off his hat to her. It was not until later that she realised the significance of the gesture. Every one does not recognise the fact that the English working-man never takes off his hat to ladies. A man who does so is not a working-man. He is, or has been, among the ranks of those who do take off their hats : that is, he is, or has been, a gentleman. As Valentine went up the stairs this man went slowly into the ground floor front. She turned to look at him. He looked quite old and was tall, but stooped a good deal. It was too dark to see much of him, but the gaslight in the street outside lit up the narrow passage. She could see that he had long white hair and a great mass of it, and that his chin was white with a week's growth of beard, for it was now Friday, and he only shaved on Sunday morning. His eyes met Valentine's in the doorway, and she remembered afterwards a strange sadness in them, which made her wonder what was the history of the man. In her own room she lit her reading-lamp, and sat down intending to follow out some of the lines of thought opened up to her by her discovery. But she remembered Lotty

in the next room, and with self-reproach she went to see her.

The other two girls were out, and Lotty was lying alone. She was in much suffering to-night; her back was bad and her cough was bad; she was moaning as she lay, but in a whisper, so to speak, because when people sleep three in a bed, the habit is acquired of doing one's groans inaudibly for fear of waking the others. The house was nearly opposite the public-house, and the smell of beer and tobacco with the noisy talk of the drinking men came pouring in at the open window.

'What have you eaten to-day?' asked Valentine.

'I am not hungry. Well, then; bread and tea.'

'How long did you work?'

'The others worked all day from half-past six o'clock till nearly nine. But I had to lie down sometimes.'

From half-past six till nine! Fourteen hours and a half—all the livelong day. They had been doing this for eight years, and they were going on with it all their lives, with no hope of any change or any improvement or

any mitigation. It seems a heavy sentence, my sisters, for the Sin of Eve.

Valentine remembered that in her cupboard there lay a great bagful of grapes—big purple grapes from a hothouse, every one as big as a pigeon's egg, and beautiful to look upon for their delicate bloom. Claude left them there for her. Without any more talking, she got a bunch of these and began to put them one by one into Lotty's mouth, just as a nurse gives food to a little child. It was chiefly exhaustion that had brought on the pain. When she had eaten a few of the grapes it was nearly gone.

Then Valentine carried her into her own room, and laid her on her own bed and undressed her.

'You shall stay here to-night,' she said, 'a little out of the noise from the street. And, besides, my bed is softer than yours. I can sleep in the easy-chair. Don't dare to say a word, Lotty. Remember that I am Melenda's sister'—Oh, Valentine!—'and you have never seen me in a rage. I can get into terrible rages if I am contradicted or put out. There, now you are comfortable. Oh, what ragged stockings and shoes! I shall give you a new pair

to-morrow. Melenda said you were to have whatever I gave you. And you want everything, you poor thing! And now you must eat some more grapes.'

'If you could only persuade Melenda to take some,' said Lotty. 'But she won't, and she's getting thinner every day.'

'What shall I do? How can I persuade her?'

'Don't do anything, and then, perhaps, she'll come round.'

'Now, Lotty, listen to me. To-morrow is Saturday. The next day is Sunday. I shall do all your work for you to-morrow—do you hear?—and that will give you two days' rest. And then we will see afterwards.'

'You can't do my work.'

'Yes, I can. Why, I can do all kinds of work. Are you tired now?'

'I was tired when you came; but I am not tired now. It was the grapes. You wouldn't rather be out than sitting with me, would you? But, of course, you are a young lady. Lizzie and the City Road isn't fit company for you. Not that it's good for Liz.'

'I would rather be here with you.' Valen-

tine stroked her thin cheek and soft hair. 'It's better for both of us.'

'Oh! you are good,' said Lotty. 'And please don't mind Melenda. She flies out easy, but she comes round again; and she's kind to me, and never out of temper, though sometimes my back's too bad for me to do any work at all. Then she works for both. There's not a quicker girl with her needle anywhere than Melenda.'

'I will try not to mind. But, Lotty, is there nothing that can be done for you? Have you no friends anywhere?'

'No, I haven't got any friends. Father and mother were country born and bred, and I don't know where they came from. I've got no friends—only Melenda.'

'Let me be your friend too.' Valentine stooped and kissed the girl's forehead. 'Don't be proud, like Melenda. Let me be your friend too, Lotty.'

'Oh! it's wonderful,' said Lotty. 'Why, you are crying too, and you're a young lady. How can I be friends with a young lady?'

'Why not? And I'm Melenda's sister, you know.'

Again—oh, Valentine!

'Melenda says you ought to be like herself, and a work-girl. Sam—that's her brother——'

'I know my brother Sam,' said Valentine. A third time? Oh, mendacious one! But it is only the first step which gives trouble.

'Sam says there oughtn't to be gentlemen and ladies—only men and women. But then, ladies don't use language, and they don't drink. It must be a beautiful thing to be a lady, even without the fine things you had on when you came here first.'

'If I am a lady, that is all the more reason for my being your friend. Tell me about yourself. How is it you are so friendless? And were you always so poor?'

'It's through father—because he failed and went bankrupt.'

'Oh! is that all?' Mere bankruptcy, in the light of Ivy Lane poverty, seemed a very small thing.

'Father had a shop once in the Goswell Road, you know. It wasn't a big place, but oh! it was a most beautiful little shop, with a parlour behind and four bedrooms above. In those days we used to go to school—not a Board school, but a Select Academy for young

ladies, kept by a real lady who had been a dressmaker in a large way, but met with misfortunes—a beautiful school. On Sunday we all went to chapel, where we had a pew, and put on our Sunday frocks. I don't think there ever was a man fonder of his business and prouder of his shop than father. He'd be content to spend the whole day in it, setting out the things, sorting his drawers, and talking with his customers. And sometimes he'd go out and stand on the kerb admiring his windows, where the ribbons used to hang up most lovely. But mother she'd make him put on his hat and go out for an hour of fresh air. Mostly he'd go down Aldersgate Street and into Cheapside, just to see how they dressed their windows. After a good day's takings, he'd come in and have supper and talk about bigger premises and of the time when we would be his assistants.'

The romance of a small draper's shop! Yet in it were all the elements which make up romance: the hopes and ambitions of a man for himself and those he loved—the family and the home, the wife and the children—and unexpected fate impending over all with cruel and

undeserved disaster. No castle with moated keep could contain better elements of romance.

'And no thought,' said Lotty, 'of what would happen.'

'What did happen?'

'Father went bankrupt. He was broke.'

'How was he—broke?'

'I don't know. The customers fell off. Everybody said it was bad times and so many out of work. It couldn't be the fault of father; nobody could be more civil and obliging. Perhaps they got things cheaper at the stores and the big shops; but father said everyone must make his profit, else how could people live? Whatever it was, the customers fell off, and then father he began to get low-spirited and anxious, and things got worse. As for mother, she'd sit and cry until he came in, and then she'd brisk up and pretend to laugh, and say things would come round, and cheer him up a bit. Oh, poor mother!'

'Poor mother!' Valentine echoed.

'That lasted a long time, and we got poorer every day. There was no more school for us, and we sent away the girl. And one day I remember—it's twelve years ago and more—

father came into the back parlour, and sat down and cried as if his heart would break because there was a man in possession, and we were ruined.'

'Oh!'

'That's all. They sold everything we had, and the beautiful shop that we'd all been so proud of was empty and shut up. Then we went into lodgings, and father began to look out for work. But there, he was heart-broken, and he went about as if he was silly.'

'And then?'

'Why, he came home every day without finding it. Nobody, you see, is so helpless as a draper who's been bankrupt. For the other tradesmen despise a bankrupt, and it makes them think that he must drink or be extravagant. And, besides, he knows too much. They don't like to let shop-assistants learn all the secrets of the trade. So he could get no work. Then mother, she took ill with the misery, and went off her poor head, and no wonder.' Lotty stopped to choke. 'The parish took her, and she died.'

'And what became of your father?'

'Oh! don't blame him, poor dear, because

he was quite broken-hearted. And he began to drink, and then he had to be a roader for the parish at eighteenpence a day—him who'd kept his own shop; and one day he took a chill from standing in the mud with his broom and his bad boots, and went to hospital, and died there.'

'And then you were left alone? You and —had you any brothers or sisters?'

Lotty hesitated.

'Don't tell me more than you like, my dear,' said Valentine.

'There was—one—other,' Lotty replied with hesitation. 'It was Tilly.'

'What became of Tilly? Did she die, too?'

'Hush!' Lotty whispered. 'I don't know where she is now, whether she's alive or dead. She said she wouldn't stand it, and she went away.'

'What did she go away for?'

'She was a beader: she was that clever with her fingers she could do all kinds of things. Once she had very good work as a butterfly-and-bird hand, and did flat-work and slip-stitching. But there wasn't much work, and she couldn't get enough to keep her; and one

day she up and said she wouldn't stand it any longer, and so, with only a kiss and a cry, she went right away—Melenda was out, else she'd never ha' let her go—and we've never seen her since. Sometimes Melenda goes to look for her, but she's never found her.'

'Where has she gone, then? Where does Melenda look for her?'

Lotty did not answer this question.

'Sometimes,' she said, 'when I'm alone in the evening, I think I hear her step upon the stair, and oh! what I would do if Tilly would only come back, and be good again—my poor Tilly!—just as she used to be, and bear it all brave, like Melenda.'

'And then I think about Liz,' Lotty went on after a pause. 'Because she's discontented, like Tilly, and the hard work frets her; and she doesn't get enough to eat, and her father's awful poor, and can't help her.'

'Who is her father?'

'It's old Mr. Lane, downstairs. They say he was a gentleman once, and he did something'—'did something,' beautiful euphemism!—'and got into trouble. He writes letters for the German Jews at Whitechapel when they

first come, and for the German workmen in the Curtain Road, where they are all furniture men. He knows a lot of languages, but he's so dreadful poor he can't give Liz anything.'

'My dear, is the whole street full of terrible stories like this?'

'Well, we're poor, and I suppose there's stories about all of us—how we came to be poor.'

'There is one thing you've not told me, Lotty: how you came to know Melenda.'

Lotty told that story too. It was a story of two girls' friendship for each other—a friendship passing that of David and Jonathan, commonly supposed to be the leading case in friendship; and how one girl who was strong stood by and worked for the other who was weak; and how for her sake she bore patiently with tyrannies, petty cheatings, bullyings, and defraudings; and how the two presently found another girl as helpless and friendless as themselves, and forced her to remain with them, and kept her in the stony path of labour and of self-respect. Quite a common story—only a wild weed kind of story—a story which may be picked up in every gutter; so that one

wonders why Valentine's heart burned within her, and why the tears crowded into her eyes and ran down her cheeks.

'You must talk no more, Lotty,' she said, when her story was finished. 'They are getting quieter outside and you will be able to sleep very soon. There—the grapes are within your reach. I shall do very well on the chair. Good-night, my dear. Your cough will be better now. Oh! Lotty, Lotty—I never knew there could be such dreadful troubles as these. Poor child!'

'Don't cry. Perhaps Tilly will come back.'

'We must all be sisters together, my dear, and love each other,' said Valentine, with some incoherence, but she had her meaning. 'It is all that we can do. There is nothing else that will help us all—nothing else.'

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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